This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600093626W

293 e. 215

CHAPTERS

ON THE

POETS OF ANCIENT GREECE.

BY

HENRY ALFORD, M.A.

VICAR OF WYMESWOLD, LEICESTERSHIRE, AND LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

LONDON:

WHITTAKER & Co.; SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & Co.

DEARDEN, NOTTINGHAM.

1841.

293 e 215.

W. DEARDEN, PRINTER, NOTTINGHAM.

TO THE

REV. JOHN ALLEN, M.A.

HEAD MASTER OF KING EDWARD SIXTH'S SCHOOL,

AT ILMINSTER,

AND PERPETUAL CURATE OF KNOWLE ST. GILES'S, SOMERSET,

These Chapters are Dedicated,

IN AFFECTIONATE AND GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION OF THE HAPPY TIME SPENT IN ACQUIRING, UNDER HIM, THE FIRST KNOWLEDGE OF THE POETS OF ANCIENT GREECE,

BY HIS

EVER ATTACHED FRIEND AND PUPIL.

PREFACE.

THE greater part of the following Chapters have already appeared in Dearden's Miscellany. My design in writing them was this: that persons unacquainted with the originals, but lovers of poësy, might be put in possession of some of the principal beauties of these ancient poets of Greece. I have therefore endeavoured to avoid, as much as possible, ground on which none but scholars can tread, and have attempted to invest with general poetic interest those points of classical lore on which I have been compelled to touch.

This series is not, nor was it intended to be, complete: a projected chapter on Pindar has been unavoidably delayed, and I would willingly have taken in more of the perfect dramas of Sophocles, and the touching scenes of Euripides. But this may be done hereafter.

Meanwhile the publication of the present series may serve as a feeler for the probable success of any future renewal of the plan.

I have to offer my thanks to Mr. Lewis, the publisher of the print which forms my frontispiece, for his kind permission to copy the same.

WYMESWOLD, Nov. 23, 1840.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FRONTISPIECE.

THIS print of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is copied from an ancient picture found at Pompeii. The attendants are in the act of carrying the virgin to the altar; her body is bared for the slaughter: Agamemnon, her father, stands on the left, with his face concealed in his robe: Calchas, the minister of death, holds the fatal knife ready for the sacrifice. Above in the clouds, appears the goddess Artemis, with the hind which, according to the legend, was substituted for the royal virgin.

The reader will observe a remarkable omission in the picture; the feet of Iphigeneia not being represented. But the ancients frequently omitted parts of their objects which were not needful to the immediate subject: and the main effect being produced by the figure of the body of Iphigeneia, they would not be solicitous about completing it.

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.—OF POETRY IN GENERAL.

SUBJECT PROPOSED—Objections to Poetry—Answered—Poetry defined—Poetry as an Art—Art Exemplified—Poetry distinct from Sculpture and Painting—Truth in Art, what—Poetry the highest of Arts—Versification proper and essential to Poetry—Rhyme—pp. 1—10.

KINDS OF POETRY—1. HEROIC or EPIC—Quasi Epic—2. DRAMATIC—Tragedy—Comedy—Melodrame. Pastoral Poetry. 3. LYRICAL. Announcement of the particular subject of the present volume, pp. 10—16.

CHAPTER II.—HOMER. THE ILIAD.

Origin of Homer—Opinions concerning him—Date of his poems. The Iliad—Supposed Subject. The Odyssey. Not to be considered as wholes. THE TALE OF TROY, pp. 17—20.

Analysis of, and translation of passages from, the Iliad;—excellence of the Iliad—sonnet, pp. 20—32.

CHAPTER III.—HOMER. THE ODYSSEY.

Points of difference from the Iliad—Opening of the action. Analysis of, and translation of passages from, the Odyssey, Book I—IX, pp. 33—49.

CHAPTER IV.—THE ODYSSEY—CONTINUED.

Analysis of, and translation of passages from, the Odyssey, Books X—XXIV, pp. 50—69.

CHAPTER V.—ON THE FRAGMENTS OF THE LOST POETS OF GREECE.

Traditionary story of Gregory Nazianzen and the Greek Poets. Notices of, and translations from, SAPPHO—ALCÆUS—SIMONIDES—ALCMAN—BACCHYLIDES—ARCHILOCHUS—ANACREON, pp. 70—

CHAPTER VI.—THE GRECIAN DRAMA—ÆSCHYLUS.

The Grecian character. The Grecian Drama—its origin and arrangements—Distinction from the modern drama—Æschylus—the PROMETHEUS BOUND—Argument—Analysis of, and translation of parts—Mysteriousness of the subject, pp. 85—105.

CHAPTER VII.—THE ORESTÉA OF ÆSCHYLUS.

Sequel of the tale of Troy. Subject of the Orestéa. Names of the three plays. 1. THE AGAMEMNON. Prefatory Notice. Opening of the play. Analysis with translations, pp. 106—119.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE ORESTÉA OF ÆSCHYLUS, CONTINUED.

2. THE CHOËPHORI—the arrival of Orestes—the recognition—the concerting of the plot—the vengeance—analysis, with translations of the latter part of the play. 3, THE EUMENIDES, OR FURIES. Trial and acquittal of Orestes—Political bearing of this play, pp. 120—133.

CHAPTER IX.—THE ŒDIPUS OF SOPHOCLES.

Æschylus and Sophocles compared. Plays of Sophocles. Section I. ŒDIPUS THE KING. The tale of Œdipus. Opening of the play. The pestilence—the oracle—the denunciation—the prophetic disclosures—Disclosure the first—rays of hope—Disclosure the second—blindness, mental—Disclosure the third and last—blindness, corporeal, pp. 134—147.

Section II. ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS. Opening of the play—Analysis, with translations—Death of Œdipus—Sonnet, pp. 147—158.

CHAPTER X.—EURIPIDES, THE ALCESTIS.

Comparison of Euripides with Æschylus and Sophocles. Translation of the Alcestis, with the omission of one scene—Sonnet, by Milton—the Death Song of Alcestis, by Mrs. Hemans, pp. 159—188.

CHAPTER XI.—THE BIRDS OF ARISTOPHANES.

Ancient Greek Comedy—Aristophanes—the Birds. Argument—Analysis with translations, pp. 189—204.

CHAPTER XII.—THEOCRITUS AND THE PASTORAL POETS.

Pastoral Poetry and Poets, ancient and modern—Theocritus—passages translated from Idyls I, VII,—the Adoniazusæ—the Little Hercules. Bion—Moschus—Epitaph of Bion, by the latter, translated, pp. 205—222.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE ANTHOLOGY.

Origin of name—Translations of Epigrams and small pieces from Plato—Speusippus, Mnasalcus—Nossis—Asclepiades—Leonidas of Tarentum—Nicias—Diotimus—Aratus—Hegesippus—Callimachus—Menecrates of Smyrna—Demodocus—Archelaus—uncertain Authors, pp. 223—236.

APPENDIX I.

General Description of Greece for the purposes of this Work—the principal Cities of European Greece— the most celebrated Mountains of Greece—the most celebrated Rivers—the most celebrated Poets—a List of the Grecian Deities, pp. 237—243.

APPENDIX II.

Poems from various Authors connected with the Subjects of the foregoing Chapters, pp. 244—263.

POETRY AND POETS.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS POETRY? Why is it that Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakspeare, Milton, Goethe, Wordsworth, and the rest of those whom we call POETS, have names which outlive and outshine those of the warriors, statesmen, and philosophers of the world? By what charm has it been that the climates of the globe, the varying fashions of diverse ages, the distinct national minds of races otherwise unconnected, have been bound together and made one? Subject proposed.

These are the questions to which we wish to return full and satisfactory answers. Let not our readers be alarmed at the announcement. The *Philosophy of Poetry* may have a somewhat startling sound; but we shall endeavour to make its explanation verify the assertion of own poet, where he says,

> How charming is Divine Philosophy!
> Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
> But musical as is Apollo's lute.

Aristotle, in the outset of a far drier treatise than our chapters on Poetry,* took some pains to state what sort of a *hearer* befitted his subject; to frame, we suppose, the minds of his readers aright, that they might be, without the labour of tedious dissuasion and instruction, apt recipients of what he was about to deliver. By us also something of the sort must be set down. For there are many prejudices, and more errors, current respecting our subject.

* Ethics, book 1. chap. 3.

Attend then, gentle readers, and let us exercise for a few moments a mild influence over your thoughts.

Objections to Poetry.

If you would understand these chapters, the first prejudice which we call upon you to lay aside, is the widely spread notion, that *Poetry is a trifle.* 'The dreams of poets' are spoken of with contempt, as little better than the ravings of madmen. 'A poetical license' is used as denoting a mis-statement or exaggeration. Poetry in general is classed with what is called light reading, and supposed not to be worthy of the attention of sober and serious minds. 'Poems and works of fiction' are opprobriously coupled together. The work of the poet is supposed to be a mere castle in the air, serving the purpose of exciting temporary wonder, but leaving no basis of reality, and not tangible by the searcher for truth.

Answered.

To confute all this would be to anticipate our future reasonings. We would only remind you, that if Poetry be a trifle, it is the greatest of trifles. It is the vehicle in which knowledge was first conveyed to the human race: the chosen instrument of the providence of God, by which scattered and savage nations were brought into one place and under one law; the language of the Holy Spirit himself, wherein things beyond man's knowledge are shadowed forth, and the deepest mysteries clothed in melody and light. It has been in all ages the delight of the great, the wise, and the good; from the sweet singer of Israel, whose strains are with us, whether he meditated them on the desert-pastures, or in the state-chambers of Zion: from the sage and gentle Plato, who has hallowed the clear Ilissus and its plane tree in 'thoughts that move harmonious numbers;' to Dante, the morning star of the Reformation: to our own statesmen, Spenser, Sidney, and Raleigh; our divines, Donne and Young, Herbert and Crashaw. It has ever been the teacher, hallower, and ameliorator of mankind: the poems of Homer and Hesiod contained the history, mythology, (which was the religion), laws, military and civil, husbandry, and domestic usages, of Ancient Greece: from those of their dramatic writers are brought stately sentences of moral import, which are quoted even in the

Scriptures of Truth; in descriptive poets of all ages are contained lovely and melodious passages, which form the text-book of a nation's feeling, and unknit the brow of worldly care; the night scenes in Homer and Milton; the 'meditations, fancy free,' of our beloved Shakspeare; the deep droppings of music from the lips of our venerated Wordsworth. More especially has poetry been the teacher of men, when a teacher is most necessary; in the age when the mind is emerging from subjection, when the feelings are strong and ill-subdued, and the reason unstable and weak. Who does not remember, (for no man has always been unfeeling) when this wonderful world first opened its stores to his mind and heart? when the master key was at length furnished, by which all the treasures of beauty were unlocked to him? Who cannot trace the influence on his thoughts and feelings, then enjoyed and profited by, now, alas, too little regarded, which followed his first perusal of the great 'kings of song?'

If Poetry then be a *trifle* (as in one sense, what is not?) it is one which yet deserves examination, as having exercised, and still continuing to exercise, very important influences on the minds and destinies of men.

Next must be discussed the fallacy on which is grounded the complaint of men of the world, from Thucydides downwards, that Poetry is falsehood—that poets are misrepresenters of facts and men—that their descriptions are exaggerated, their narratives unlikely, their sentiments unfit for practice.

But the refutation of this error will at once lead us to the actual discussion and answering of the question which we placed at the head of our chapter—WHAT IS POETRY?—for we cannot satisfy you that it is *not* all the things above mentioned, except by exhibiting it to you as it is—that seeing its real character and uses, you may turn with the more loathing from the unsightly caricature of it which is often placed before you.

Poetry defined

First then (for such as know it not) we must premise that in the Greek language, from which all terms of art and philosophy are derived, the word Poetry signifies '*creation:*' a

Poem, '*a thing created:*' and a Poet, '*a creator.*' And we must also assure them that there are few words which have swerved less from their original meaning, than these three; so that even at the present day, when all traces of the first derivation of words have in so many instances been lost in their conventional signification, there are no better definitions of Poetry, a Poem, and a Poet, than these simple construings of their Greek originals. The only difference is, that in early times, the words were extended more widely than they now are; the Poietes was the artist in general, the Poiesis the art on which he was engaged, and the Poiema the work of art produced in each case. And very properly so, for in this respect Poetry may be considered in common with all art—all works of art being the *creation* of the artist. Let us then for a time thus consider it; as it is an Art.

Poetry as an Art

Now in order to discover *how* it is the office of Art to *create*, we must ascertain *why* it creates; for the purpose of its work, when known, will guide us through the consideration of the work itself.

The object of all art is *to give pleasure*—not using the word in its low and vulgar sense, but in that refined sense which implies that nothing corporeal or animal is meant by it, nor any thing peculiar to individual characters, nor attached to local circumstances, nor following upon selfish gratification; but that it belongs to the higher and nobler part of man; that it is general in its operations, the same in all times and places, and free from the bad elements which deprave and embitter human life. All instances of descending and pandering to the lower and more confined sorts of pleasure, are so many faults in art.

The method by which art excites this high and pure pleasure, is by the presentation of *Beauty*. And here it is universal in its range. The ends of art are equally accomplished, whether the subject be beauty of an intellectual or moral kind, or the symmetry of the human or animal frame, or collections, with or without colour, of the objects of inanimate nature. The instruments by which this beauty is

presented are various; and by their variety, the arts are distinguished. While their subject matter is the same, the vehicles by which it enters the mind are peculiar to the separate arts. Let us take an instance in one department. Agamemnon, leader of the forces of Greece, assembled for the Trojan war, is detained by contrary winds at Aulis, a port of Greece. He consults the prophet Calchas, how he may obtain favourable winds for the fleet. He is informed that it can only be done by the sacrifice of a virgin of his own royal line on the altar of the goddess Artemis. Iphigeneia, his lovely daughter, is led out as the victim. The ministers of death stand round the altar. She trembles; the knife glitters; her garments fall round her; the royal parent hides his face in agony. Now either the painter might bring this scene before us, clothed in colours, on the canvass;—the pale cheek of the poor victim might contrast with the gorgeous robes of the priests, and earth, sky, and sea, might blend their hues to centre our admiration on the main objects of the picture;—or the sculptor might, in pure unaided marble, chisel the languid and falling form of the fragile maiden, and the solemn drapery of the vestured minister; and might raise over all, the kingly figure, stately in grief, of the averted father;—or the poet might, spurning the aid of imitative matter, clothe in words of music the solemn scene, and touch the universal heart of mankind with the collected feelings of the sad assemblage. The picture was actually done by Timanthes, and was the wonder and delight of the age; the description in poetry has been done, in Greek by the wild choric strains of Æschylus, and in Latin by the musical hexameters of Lucretius.

Distinct from Sculpture and Painting

But it must not be forgotten, that, in their presentation of beauty to the mind, the arts of Sculpture and Painting are necessarily limited by the materials which they employ. Sculpture, using stone as its material,—in its most perfect form, insulated groups, is precluded from embodying any ideas except those capable of being thus conveyed. It is fitted for exciting pleasure by the graceful disposition of figures and drapery, and still more, by the unclothed symmetry of the

wonderful frame with which the Creator has endowed us: striking situations of individual passion, or groups pervaded by or conveying one feeling, or subordinate to some master-figure,—these form strictly the province of this art. In alto and basso-relievos, where it encroaches somewhat on the sister art of Painting, it possesses more powers, extending even to the partial representation of distant figures and objects. But beyond this (and even this will hardly be pronounced legitimate by the lover of the higher sort of Sculpture) it cannot extend. It cannot deal with the inanimate forms of individual and combined beauty which are scattered around us. The face of the earth, with its variety of level plain, and hill, and rock, the trees and waters, the sky and its great lights, all these are incapable of being conveyed to the mind by Sculpture. Again, Painting, which can bring these last before the eye, and whose range extends over all beauty of simple and compound form, not abstracted from colour as in Sculpture, but clothed in all hues with effects most exquisitely blended, is inadequate, in her turn, to embrace more than a single point of action or scenery: the complicated course of human designs and feelings, the origin and progress of passion, are beyond its power, unless, as in the former case, it departs from its lawful object, or claims to present in a series, detached points of a progress, whose intervals must be filled up by the mind of the beholder.

Poetry, on the other hand, is unlimited in its range over space and time. The material which the Poet employs, is available to all purposes, and unfailing in its adequacy to any ideas which he may wish to invest with it. It is not a material made to his hands, and to which he must be in bondage; but one subtle as thought itself, admitting continual change and closer adaptation to his end, and containing in itself the representative symbols of all that can be the object of the senses, or the subject of mental contemplation.

Truth in Art, what.

Now, in each of these three arts, the object of the artist is to give pleasure, by the presentation of beauty—and our present question is, Is that beauty *true* or *false*? Let us not

say, *actual* or *imaginary;* for this would be begging the question; as it is on the meaning of this word, *imaginary*, that the whole enquiry turns. Let us recur to the instance which we just now gave—that of the representation, by either of these arts, of the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter. No one can doubt that the scene furnishes legitimate employment for art of the very highest order. Now, let us ask any candid reader, whether, before enjoying a group, a picture, or a description of that scene, he would require to be satisfied that it did actually take place? Whether upon reading Bryant's Mythology, and finding that it is there represented as by no means probable that the Trojan war ever happened, he would feel his admiration one whit diminished, or the pleasure which the group, the picture, or the poem might have given him, changed into indifference? On the other hand, if any effect be produced by such a persuasion, it is one of regret that the actuality (so to speak) of the scene has been removed, thereby shewing the superiority of the work of art, inasmuch as we are displeased that actual occurrences have never come up to it.

Truth then, in art, has a somewhat different meaning from that in which we ordinarily use the word as applied to representations of things by language. It is not essential to truth in art, that the combination of things represented should ever have had an exact prototype in actual life on this earth; in Sculpture the group, in Painting the arrangement of form and colour, in Poetry the exquisite adaptation of words, are none the less true in art, although the occurrence or situation represented may have owed its origin to the imagination of the artist.

In what then, does *artistical* truth consist? By what rules is the creative power of the artist bounded?

In order to answer this question, let us reflect what it is in works of art which gives us the most exquisite pleasure. Though we frequently speak in ignorance, referring to our feelings as others name them, without due inquisition into their real nature, yet current expressions may often serve to

the philosopher as confirmations to his hearers of the doctrine which he is laying down. Who has not heard admiration expressed by the words, 'How natural?' Who, on the other hand, has not heard disapprobation uttered in the assertion, 'This is unnatural?' These expressions may serve to shew our readers that there is a generally acknowledged reference to what is called 'Nature,' in judging of works of art. In other words, there is a requirement made, that works of art shall not be at variance with the rules, physical and moral, of the great and first Creator. Every such variance is a falsehood in art, and as such cannot please: except perhaps it be some few minds, or for a time, or owing to some adventitious circumstances.

But is truth, or perfection in art, measured by adherence to these rules on the part of the artist? In the purest or most general sense, it is. Perfect adaptation of individual physical and moral character to circumstance and situation; — the presentation of human bodies, and of scenes, where all the particular beauties of complexion and contour in the one case, and of hill and dale, trees and sky, and animated nature in the other, are gathered in one; may be viewed as only the carrying forward the general rules by which the universe is created and arranged, to the exclusion of all hindrances. This is the true province of all art: to present to us what we never can have in our actual experience, (or can only have them obstructed by many unwelcome things) combinations of things beautiful, in beautiful wholes; and 'to subject,' as Lord Bacon justly says, 'the shows of things to the desires of the mind.'

Poetry the highest of Arts.

Now, of all arts, Poetry holds by far the highest place. For, besides the range of its creative power being unlimited as to *subject*, it possesses, what neither Sculpture nor Painting does, the faculty of presenting a *succession* of description and action. So that time and space are alike open to the mind of the poet; the complications, wheel within wheel, of human motives, the gradual unfolding of great purposes, even to their final and distant accomplishment: the vicissitudes of life, full

of deep interest, exciting pity or joy, or a sense of the divine justice; all these are the legitimate subjects of Poetry, in their highest sense, and fullest developement.

Poetry can also descend into and excel in the provinces of the two sister sciences, Painting and Sculpture. All the effect of a fine painting can be wrought in the mind without the ministration of the eye, by the magic power of poetical description. The repose and fitness of a fine statue, or group of statues, does not more bless the mind of the beholder with the sense of still beauty, than the same scene conveyed to his thoughts by the medium of Poetry.

Versification proper and essential to Poetry.

In the further answer of our proposed question, something remains to be said respecting the medium of *verse*, in which poetry has always been pleased to clothe its creations. To explain the fitness and necessity of the employment of this medium, let us recur for illustration to the sister arts. The object of the Sculptor being to carry pleasure as simple and unhindered as possible into the mind of his beholder, he employs as his material, not coarse and vulgar stone, but the purest marble; whose texture is free from flaw and irregularity, and whose colour is uniform and unvaried. The Painter again, being actuated by the same desire, chooses his canvas and his colours of the best and purest, and sets his paintings in frames elaborately devised, that they may appear to the best advantage. And after this choice of material and accompaniments, both are careful not to hinder the effect of their productions by situations inadequate to set off their beauty: the painter chooses his light, the sculptor his points of view: and every possible assistance, (within the rules of art) towards the general effect, is eagerly embraced.

Just so is it with the Poet. Language being the medium by which his creations are conveyed to the mind, he does not choose for that purpose words in their chance combinations, as common discourse presents them; but he so adapts his words to his thoughts as to make their very form and rhythm of itself a vehicle of pleasure. Verse is the marble in which his groups are worked: the frame and varnish by which his

pictures are embellished. So that Poetry, although not dependent on the aid of verse, (any more than marble is absolutely necessary to Sculpture, or the aids above mentioned to Painting) yet can never be sure of its effects, or clothed in its full power to please, unless it be conveyed in words possessing some sort of metrical cadence. The experiment of writing a poem in prose has often been tried by men who have been unaware of the foregoing maxims of art: and as often utterly failed. All the greatest poems by which the world has been delighted, are celebrated for their power and beauty of versification.

Rhyme. The additional ornament of rhyme, which modern Poetry of some sorts has assumed, may be similarly justified; and derives also a claim to approval from the structure and tendency of the languages in which it is used.

Kinds of Poetry. The subjects of Poetry being various, and according to their variety conveyed in various sorts of metre, we shall proceed briefly to sketch the principal kinds of Poetry; not as supposing our readers ignorant of them, but as conveying our own definitions of them, and our ideas respecting their rules and objects.

Heroic or Epic. The highest species of Poetry, beyond all question, is the Heroic or Epic. Its nature is narrative, its subject one of high interest, its style elevated and sustained throughout, its metre regular and solemn. It is necessary that there should be in it one leading person or one leading object, to which all the rest are subordinate, and to the fortunes of whom, or the developement of which, every part of the poem in some measure contributes. In it the poet speaks in his own person, and is himself throughout the poem apparent; introducing his own thoughts, and interweaving with the course of the narrative reflections, as of the master mind which sees the whole course of action complete. The most illustrious examples of the strict epic, are the well known poems of Homer and Virgil, the Gierusalemme Liberata of Tasso, and the Paradise Lost of Milton. There will perhaps never again be a great epic poem. Coleridge used to say, that he imagined

the only subject of sufficient general interest, which had not been attempted, was, the capture of Jerusalem by Titus. But of such poems, writers, as well as subjects, will ever be exceedingly rare. To write an epic requires a combination of faculties which we seldom find in one individual, especially now that the great patterns of this sort of poetry are well known and appreciated.

Quasi Epic.

Next to this, and under the same great head, must be ranged that Poetry, narrative, allegorical, or meditative, which yet does not conform itself to the rules of the epic. Like that, however, it requires majesty of style and diction; like that, it is the voice of the poet himself, and in it he is seen and known. But unlike the epic, it is not bound to be subordinate to any acknowledged developement of circumstances, or the exhibition of any individual character. The examples of this kind which will best explain it to the reader, are the Divina Commedia of Dante, the Faerie Queene of Spenser, and in our own time, the Excursion of Wordsworth. Under this head might also be classed the numerous poetical narratives of which Scott set the example, and the poems of travel and personal incident, of which Lord Byron's Childe Harold may serve as an instance. These however are far inferior in rank as poems to those just now mentioned. It is in this department of Poetry, the Quasi-epic, if we may be allowed the word, that there seems in our own age the greatest promise of excellence. Poems of a meditative form, in which the thoughts and descriptions are conveyed by simple and subordinate narrative, seem to be the peculiar growth of the present school of poets.

2 Dramatic.

Tragedy.

The second great division of Poetry is the Dramatic. In poems of this kind the action is carried on and the sentiments delivered, not by narrative from the poet, but by the persons themselves. The poet is not seen in the work. The diction and metre of dramatic poems are varied according to the nature of the subject. In tragedy, the higher species of Drama, (taking that term in its strict and ancient sense) the

events are weighty and solemn, the motives somewhat beyond those of common life, ; the characters not calculated so much with a view to please by their attractiveness, as to awe by their majesty, and power for good or evil ; the diction elaborate and elevated, the metre steady and unornamented ; the actors raised above ordinary persons, either by the distinction of birth and office, or by the nature of the events with which they are associated. In this sense of tragedy, it is not necessary that the issue of the plot be unfortunate ; indeed some of the most perfect dramas of this kind end (to use a common expression) happily. This strict tragedy was singularly suited to the religion and taste of Ancient Greece. The veil of mystery which hung over the destinies of men and nations, the unexplained and dreaded workings of Fate in individuals and families, the belief in oracles,—all these were points of advantage to the Dramatic Poet, which in their degree and extent, have never elsewhere been presented. Add to this, that the Athenian audience was composed of the most susceptible of mankind ; of men who could apprehend and feel to the utmost, situations, which the levity, or the phlegm of the moderns cannot appreciate. In consequence, the most illustrious, if not the only examples of strict tragedy, are to be found in the writings of the three great poets of European Greece, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Comedy.

In the other department of Dramatic Poetry, viz., Comedy, the object of the poet is to excite pleasure, by the exhibition of the common events of life in an agreeable or ludicrous light. Comedy is not unfrequently mixed with satire. In its most ancient form, conspicuous persons were introduced on the stage by their real names ; when this license was curbed by law, the actions and lives of public men still continued to be stigmatized under fictitious characters. But satire is not essential to comedy. The metre of comedy is bound by no rules ; and it may often degenerate into prose ; conspicuous however by its antithetical arrangement and epigrammatic point, which distinguish it from mere every day

conversation, with which no audience could be interested. The endless varieties of plot, machinery, and diction, of which comedy admits, cannot be treated of in a general essay like the present; they will occur to the reader who is acquainted with the best productions of the ancients and moderns; and will be laid before him in individual instances in the succeeding chapters.* The most perfect examples of the ancient comedy have been lost to us in the writings of Menander, if we may judge from the version of some of his plays by the incomparable Terence. The wit and satire of Aristophanes have descended to us in several comedies, of which, in our opinion, 'the Birds" is by far the best. We shall give a sketch of it hereafter.

Melodrame.

But there must not be omitted a mixed kind of Drama, of complicated action, containing in itself frequently both tragedy and comedy, and affecting us with pleasure, blended in various degrees with other feelings, as the scenes are solemn or gay, pathetic or ludicrous, or compounded of all these, setting off one another. This mixed drama has been carried to the utmost perfection by our own immortal Shakspeare, in plays which are the most consummate monuments of human genius.

Pastoral Poetry.

There is also another kind of poetry, nearly akin to the Drama, and forming the link between it and lyrical poems; viz., that which is comprehended under the name of Pastoral Poetry. The idyl or eclogue is sometimes a simple ode, from whence its name (εἰδύλλιον) is derived; sometimes a dialogue of persons contending in verse, or describing some favourite subject, sometimes a piece of dramatic action, as in many cases in Theocritus. The metre of this last is usually recommended by more than common sweetness and ease, being the *setting* of a poem altogether artificial, and derived from a state of life entirely imaginary; and therefore being so contrived as

* This promise will be fulfilled in after volumes, if the experiment tried in the publication of the present one shall be found to have succeeded.

of itself to delight the taste of the reader, and bespeak his approval beforehand.

3 LYRICAL.

The third general division of poetry is the Lyrical: under which are included all odes, hymns, and songs, whether intended for music or not. In its ancient and strict form, the ode was composed for performance, often in the course of the drama, but frequently as the celebration of victory or other joyful occasion. The words, the music, and the dresses and positions of the singers, all contributed to the effect of the ancient choral odes. In them, weighty sentences of divine and moral import were delivered; impassioned flights of poetic ardour were sanctioned by the situations of the drama, and sustained by the character of the melody. In the East, at the same time, 'the sweet singers of Israel' were raising to the harps of the temple, strains of worthier praise to Jehovah; 'the prayer of Moses the man of God' (Psalm xc.), the solemn confession of the royal and penitent Psalmist (Ps. li.) and most of the other hymns in that sublime collection, were in their turn used in the regular service of the temple. The metre of this species of poetry has ever been exceedingly free and varied. It seems however to be required that at the recurrence of similar strains in the music, and similar cadences, corresponding changes in the metre should be observed: and that according to the subjects treated, the march of the verse should be stately and solemn, or light and tripping.

But in modern lyric poetry we have far more examples of odes and hymns not intended for music, but trusting to their lyrical form for full effect; or from novelty of metre and cadence, (as in Collins's Hymn to Evening) delighting the ear, and bearing with them, so to speak, their own music.

The ode is a poem highly wrought and elaborately finished, and always dependent for its effects more upon beauty of words and measure, than upon the actual thoughts and images conveyed: though, of course, these last must be in accordance with the diction and metre, or the effect will be impaired. The most perfect examples extant of the choral ode, are

perhaps the following: in sacred writ, Psalm xxiv., and cvii.*; in the ancient drama, the first chorus in the Agamemnon of Æschylus, the first chorus in the Antigone of Sophocles, and (for I am uncertain which to choose) almost all the choruses of Euripides. Of the other kinds of odes and hymns, we should select the lyrical part of our elder dramatists (of which we shall treat in their turn) as the most exquisite specimens: and in modern lyrical poetry some of the odes of Campbell (Hohenlinden, and the Battle of the Baltic, are our favourites) and many of the longer pieces (we would name especially the Lotos-eaters) of Alfred Tennyson.

Thus we have presented our readers with a brief and cursory sketch of the different kinds of poetry. In all these the artist mind employs its power, gathering together things seemly and beautiful, and in the language of a modern poet,*

* * hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.

In this our first chapter we have been dealing (of necessity) with general subjects. We propose leading our readers (with their consent and good will) through the treasures of ancient and modern Poetry, in the following chapters of this series. We shall be taking them pleasant excursions, first over the rocky forks of Parnassus, by the seas of Europe and Asia, the star-lit Euripus, and the 'broad Hellespont,' and the 'windy towers of Ilion;' then by many an ancient grotto, damp and cool, with trailing eglantine and canopy of vine-leaves, and many a palace of stately marble, and fountained courts where Dorian damsels led up the dance in the moonlight, looking on the bright Ægean;—we shall tell them of the cradle-songs and dirges of heroes and empires, the downfal and revival of learning, the contests of mighty men for mightier principles; even to these our own days of Poets many and sweet, deep-

* Shelley.

thoughted and solemn; when our England has become a hallowed land, when her hills and plains, her rivers and cities, her proud lines of ancestry, and her sons of toil and obscurity, have all been the theme of Poets; when every step we tread brings us into the immortal presence of some gifted soul.

CHAPTER II.

HOMER.

"He cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with or prepared for the well-enchanting skill of music, and with a tale forsooth he cometh to you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner."

THESE, reader, are the words of Sir Philip Sidney, in his Defence of Poesie; and well do they fit the greatest of all poets, who is the subject of our present chapter. Origin of Homer.

HOMER, be this the name of an individual or a family, one in many, or many in one, arose in the Asiatic provinces of Greece. Of those countries Herodotus has said, that no part of the earth which he knew was so blessed in soil and climate. So that the fairest land nursed the first Poet.

Many are the venerable traditions and associations which crowd up around this name—HOMER. Some have represented him as an ancient bard, blind and poor, wandering from city to city, and earning subsistence by his power of song. Others have supposed that this description merely characterises a whole band of Homeric minstrels, by whose joint labour the poems were produced, sung, and delivered down to the memory of their itinerant successors. Others again have thought and laboured to prove that Homer was identical with, or close in descent from, one of his own heroes. It is enough for us, in an essay like the present, to observe, that the origin of the Homeric poems may be regarded by our readers as wrapped in obscurity, to be penetrated only by the strength of internal evidence, and that evidence not yet fully Opinions concerning them

understood. Their Asiatic origin and extreme antiquity is perhaps all that can be unquestionably decided.

Date of his poems.

Now these poems are said by Herodotus, the father of Grecian history, to have been composed four hundred years before his time; *i.e.* somewhere about the year before Christ 850; while Ahab and the later kings were reigning over Israel. So that with the exception of the five books of Moses, and one or two more books of the Old Testament, these are the oldest writings extant.

And as such are they to be treated: not to be judged of by the notions and conclusions of the more mature lifetime of the world, but to be approved as venerable relics, indicative of the strong fancy and practical wisdom of an unlettered age—an age when human passion was the actuating principle of life, and the face of nature the only book open to the eyes of men.

History of them.

A few words respecting the history of the poems may not unaptly introduce our notice of their plan and merits.

It is said that they existed at first in separate ballads, all written in one metre, and one dialect or brogue, and having reference to one great subject, viz., the tale of Troy. In the tables of contents of the various books, the titles of many of these ballads are still retained. It was believed in Ancient Greece that Pisistratus, the first minister of Athens, in the sixth century before Christ, collected these ballads together and arranged them, so as to make of them one consistent story, under the names of the *Iliad*, or 'Lay of the War of Troy,' and the *Odyssey*, or 'Adventures of Odysseus,' in his return from that war.

So that we are not to look in either of these poems for a complete whole, as a work of art. They are both fragments, if regarded according even to the professed rules of Epic poetry which have been built out of them. But in this respect they widely differ. The Iliad seems to be composed of more antique materials than the Odyssey. We may compare the former to a piece of mosaic work entirely wrought out of small fragments of antiquity; while the latter resembles

rather a damaged picture, attempted to be supplied by other pieces of the same date.

The subject of the Iliad is generally supposed to be the wrath of Achilles against his fellow chieftains of the Greeks encamped against Troy, and the mischievous consequences thereupon ensuing. Certainly if any one thing be more prominent than another throughout the poem, it is this: but it is by no means consistently kept in view; and many parts of the Iliad are plainly composed in ignorance of it altogether. Achilles is called the hero of the Iliad; but here again, it is very doubtful whether the poet ever had him in view as such. The hero is various in various parts, according as the original ballads contained the song of the prowess of such or such a chieftain.

THE ILIAD. Supposed subject.

The plan of the Odyssey is more consistent; the ultimate return of Odysseus to his home is kept in view throughout, and accomplished; but not before, as in a diseased dream, we have long become weary of the object in view, and careless about its acquisition; not until long delay has blighted all prospect of delight; and, as also do our dreams, the story goes beyond its object, and fades off in preternatural mystery and melancholy obscurity.

The Odyssey

Let so much suffice for the plan and merits, as wholes, of these wonderful compositions—and we have only said thus much in accordance with the critical consent of mankind, being ourselves little inclined to praise where praise cannot be due, or to find fault with the most sublime productions of human genius for not having that which they were never intended to have.

We had much rather regard them (and would have our readers of the same mind) as repositories of the beautiful and majestic thoughts of men long since gone by, and of the simple and prominent passions of the infancy of society. As such, we proceed to lay their treasures before our readers. And as we wish to be intelligible to all, we will give them in our native tongue, merely referring to the original Greek.

Not to be considered as wholes.

The translations are our own: for many and good as have been the versions of Homer, there is none which will suit our purpose, that of a popular transmission of his poetical beauties to the English mind.

THE TALE OF TROY.

The Troy of Homer is a city at the foot of Mount Ida, the shrubby, rocky, cavernous Ida. It is in a sandy plain, through which flow the rivulets Scamander and Simois to the Ægean sea. Its citadel is high and exposed, commanding a view of the plain. It is walled by no common walls; the god of the sea, and the bright-haired sun-god, had with their own hands built them for one of the old kings. Within these divine ramparts was contained the most beautiful of humankind, the far-famed Helen. Herself half divine, she struck and ravished the hearts of the Trojans with her beauty; and even the old and sage were moved to say, that it was no wonder that nations contended for such a woman. She had been the wife of Menelaus, king of Lacedæmon, on the Grecian side of the Ægean. Thence Paris, the young and beautiful son of the king of Troy, had carried her off in one of the piratical expeditions of the time. Vengeance for this outrage had filled the coast of Troy with hostile Grecian squadrons. Ten successive winters and summers did this host beleaguer the fated city. Far otherwise than in modern sieges, no taking by storm, no blockade was attempted. The warfare only seemed to be the theatre for national and individual prowess. Half the besieging force was always absent tilling fields for the subsistence of the rest. Allies and supplies flowed into the gates of Troy uninterrupted. Truces were frequently established, during which the adverse parties mingled unrestrainedly. The mysterious deities of Heathendom influenced and mixed in the action. Sometimes one chieftain, sometimes another is in the ascendant. The king of gods and men, himself bound by the decrees of destiny, balances the fortunes of the combatants, and allows them each his day of glory. In the midst of this lingering and complicated strife, the action of the Iliad opens. There is division

Iliad, Book I.

in the Grecian camp. Achilles, the chief of the fiery temper and unconquered strength, is insulted by the commander of the Greeks. His beautiful prize—Brisëis, is taken from him. In sorrow and rage he complains to his goddess-mother, a nymph of the ocean. He looks over the salt-sea foam and prays. His mother rises from the grey breakers like a mist, and promises to intercede for him with the King of gods. From him she obtains a promise that he would avenge her son upon the Greeks, and give victory to them of Troy till the besieging chieftains should regret his absence from the fight. This having gained,

She plunges from the glittering heaven beneath the salt-sea deeps.

Achilles then shuns the fight, and with his soldiers and his lyre spends the time as he best may. But the war is not relinquished;—the Greeks are collected to council: Book II.

From ships and tents to council thronged the warrior companies;
Sounding as when the plunging surf of many voiced seas
Along a broad beach thunders, and the deep is in a roar.

The battle is prepared; they are exhorted by Agamemnon the king of men to be ready; and again

The Grecian armies shouted loud, as when the ocean waves
Are dashing on some forward rock, round which incessant raves
The fury of all winds.

They are all armed; and the warlike goddess is among them; and they forget their homes and their wives in the ardour of their march. Then follows a chain of magnificent images;

As fire upon the mountain tops the boundless forest burns,
And all the country far and wide the spreading blaze discerns;
So glorious from the marching host the gleam of armour bright
Rose upwards to the firmament, and reached the heavenly height.
And as the myriad flocks of birds in Asian meadows throng,
Wild geese, or swans, or long-necked cranes, Cäyster's streams along,
Hither and thither flying round, and clapping with their wings,
They clang with screams discordant, and loud the meadow rings;
So poured their many multitudes from tents and ships, to meet
In the Scamandrian plain: sharp rung the earth beneath the feet

Of men and horses: till along the flowery mead they stood
Unnumbered as the leaves and flowers when spring bedecks the wood.

We pass onward fast, for we can only afford like a butterfly to sip beauties here and there, and must send our reader to Homer himself for a full revel of delight.

Book III. All this is in the second book. The third is a noble book. The armies are ranged under their leaders, and proceeding to action; here is a taste of it: not a translation, but a transferring of some parts:

The sound of war was heard that morn in Ilion's windy towers,
For from the coast avenging Greece advanced with all her powers;
Thick as the summer bees that swarm around their rocky hive,
The level fields with arms and steeds were glittering and alive.
Rise up my men, bold Hector cried, our foes are trampling near;
The dust their herald ye may see, their leaders' voices hear:
Full many a fight hath Hector waged, full oft a leader been;
But a band so many thousand strong, he never yet hath seen.
With pealing shout and clang of shield the eager Dardans rose,
And rushed upon the level field to meet the stranger foes:
Silent and wrathful to their front the Argive hosts advance,
Firm grasped was every faithful sword, and couched each trusty lance.

But now to a picture widely different—

In Ilion's inner halls the while, the fairest of her kind
On the deep-woven tapestry colour to colour joined:
She formed anew in mimic war the myriad troubles sprung
From her bright eyes, and form divine, and honey-dropping tongue.
She sate between two goodly rows of columns white and tall,
Seeming a goddess in her shrine within that palace-hall;
Light of excessive beauty shone unveiled from every limb,
She was the daylight of that place, and all besides was dim.
White glanced her arms, as o'er the work in pleasant toil they moved;
She traced her Phrygian shepherd boy, or him she once had loved;
She traced each shape of godlike chiefs with whom she played in youth,
Or led the naked Spartan dance in innocence and truth.

Then comes a scene which we are quite reluctant our readers should lose, but beauties lie so thick in our path that we must dismiss it with brief notice. While thus working, sweet and sad desire of her former husband and abode, and her young

child (for she had left one, her first, in Europe) came over her; she rises and goes forth; the elders wonder at her beauty; the aged king Priam salutes her, and places her beside him on the wall, whence she can see and describe to him the Grecian chiefs, the acquaintance of her childhood. One by one she points them out; the majesty of Agamemnon, the wisdom contained in the ordinary form and gait of Odysseus, the burly bulk of Ajax, excite by turns the old man's wonder; and the scene ends with an exquisitely pathetic touch, such as none but Homer could give: Helen is speaking:

And now I see the rest full well, each comely-visaged Greek,
Whose countenance I know of old, whose fortune I could speak;
But two I cannot recognize as leaders, far or near,
Whom the same mother bore with me, my own twin brothers dear:
Perchance they have not crost the seas from Lacedæmon's land,
Perchance e'en now they keep yon ships that line the ocean strand,
Unwilling to come down and join the battle, lest their name
Should be obscured in men's report, and share their sister's shame.
She spoke; but them long since the earth had wrapped in cold embrace
At home in Lacedæmon, in their dear native place.

But we pass on. The battle is put off, the rival husbands join in single combat, to no avail; and after various vicissitudes, at length the hosts are mingled in deadly conflict. The poet rolls on his majestic numbers, dispensing life and death; the very lists of the slain are full of melancholy majesty; and in the midst of blood and terrors, beauty and tenderness constantly break forth. Here is the grandest of battle scenes: Book IV.

And now into one spot at once the mailed squadrons roll,
With shield to shield, and spear to spear, and valiant soul to soul;
There is the shout, and there the shriek, the slaying and the slain;
Beneath the blood of heroes flows: the meadow reeks again.
As when two tempest-swollen streams, that down the mountains fret,
In some deep rocky bottom with their angry floods are met,
Both from their height tumultuous, the headlong waters pour
In one ravine, and from afar the shepherd hears their roar.

A beautiful youth, Simoeisius, so named of the river Simois,

by whose bank he was born, is slain by a Grecian chief; he is said to fall like some comely poplar by the river side: and the thought is enlarged into a beautiful simile, which want of space, not of will, compels us to omit.

Book V. The fifth book contains the ballad or lay of the prowess of Diomedes the Greek. And a formidable fellow he is; for not even the semi-material deities of the time escape the stroke of his spear. The goddess of love, who had dared to mingle in the fight, and even the god of war himself, have their celestial blood drawn by a mortal hand. All this strength is given him by Pallas Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Here is his description:

And in his day of glory, from his helmet and his shield
There gleamed a restless fire abroad across the battle field;
Most like the autumn star whose beams their brightest glory shed,
When first he rises newly-decked from out his ocean-bed.

He bears down before him the ranks of the Trojans; and again we have the storm-swollen torrent brought into comparison, carrying away bridges and fences before it. This would naturally be a favourite similitude in a rocky and pastoral country. So would likewise the frequent combats with wild beasts in defence of the flocks. In one place we have the boar surrounded by hunters and dogs, making his final stand, and terrible in death: in another the lion has entered the fold, and has been slightly wounded by the shepherd, and having his anger roused, is raging round, while the sheep crowd frightened in a corner; again we have two yonng lions who have been brought up under their mother in the thickets of a deep wood, and live by plundering the farms of oxen and sheep, till at length they fall by the spear of men. Here is a pastoral simile: Hera and Athena, the goddesses, are coming down from heaven in their chariot drawn by 'coursers of immortal breed;'

So far their high resounding steeds at one leap overbound,
As that man's vision ranges thro' the ether far and free,
Who sitting on a headland, looks along the foam-specked sea.

In the sixth book, the battle rests a while. The Trojan matrons offer a rich garment on the shrine of Pallas, for the safety of their city. Hector, who of all the characters in the Iliad leaves the most favourable impression on the reader, having left the field and entered the town to suggest this measure, takes the well-known farewell of his wife—Andromache, and his little son. Book VI.

Hector's re-appearance in the Trojan ranks is thus described: Book VII.

And as when God to sailors' prayers has sent a fav'ring breeze,
Whose weary limbs have failed with toil of rowing on the seas,
So felt the Trojan armies when their leader brave they saw.

But the crowning passage of Homer, and perhaps of all poetry, is at the end of the eighth book; the Trojans are encamped in the plain, and all night they keep up numerous fires round their camp: Book VIII.

As when the starry hosts of heaven around the full bright moon
In all their glory shine, and winds are sleeping every one;
When every rock is plainly seen, and every headland height,
And boundless æther from above pours down his opening light,
And all the signs in heaven appear, and the shepherd's heart is glad;
So many shone, between the ships and Xanthus' winding bed
The Trojan fires in front of Troy; a thousand piles were lit;
And round each fire, distinct in light, did fifty soldiers sit.*

In the ninth book, the Greeks being distressed, a message is sent, but in vain, to the haughty Achilles, requesting him to pity his countrymen and join the fight. He declares that nothing shall induce him to do so except the presence of Hector at his own ships coming to burn and destroy. Then Book IX.

* We have elsewhere translated this description as follows:—

As when the stars in heaven around the moon
Shew brightly, and the under air is calm,
And headland tops, and beacon towers, and steeps,
Are clothed with visible light, and from above
The glory of the boundless firmament
Bursts downward, and the heavenly host is seen,
The heart of him that watches by the fold
Swells in his breast for joy.

School of the Heart,
Lesson VI.

comes a night of fear and terror to the Greeks; and nobly is it described. There is no poet who throws around every line and expression, as Homer does, the spirit of the whole passage: we read with trembling, while Agamemnon wakes Nestor, and Nestor the other chiefs, and a night expedition is planned.

As dogs around the nightly fold their anxious watches keep,
Hearing some mighty beast from far come roaring for the sheep,
Down through the mountain wood; all night aloud the barkings rise,
And sleep departs away from them: so slumber from the eyes
Of all the Grecian chieftains fled; and each one's ear intent
To hear the foes advancing, toward the Trojan plain was bent.

Book X. Then follows the sally of Odysseus and Diomedes into the camp of the Trojan ally, Rhesus. The night seems especially congenial to Homer. But it is the night of Western Asia; either dark and still as death, or bright with its unclouded moon; not as in Ossian and our Northern bards, a night of mists and storms, and driving sleet or rain. The night-winds seem hardly known to Homer. The moon obscured and clear by fits, driving through the fleecy vapours; the dark masses of storm-cloud which roll suddenly away, 'turning forth their silver lining on the night,' and opening to the view of him who journeys, the crystalline firmament, with its 'patines of bright gold,' and its unfathomable depths of nebulous light; all these and many other glories of our climate, we do not find in Homer: but in return, the still and mysterious spirit of night, uniform in terror and beauty, penetrates his descriptions perhaps the more deeply, for its being without these variations.

Book XI. In the eleventh book again the battle rages; and again the Poet revels in images of terror and grandeur.

And as some lion tears the fawns of a swift-footed hind,
And she, though she be near, no help can for her young ones find;
But terror seizes on her limbs, and swift she darts away
Through thickets and through forests, from the bounding beast of prey;
So none could help the Trojan hosts in that disastrous day,
But even their chieftains trembling from the Argives fled away.

Book XII. But the tables soon are turned—Hector and his Trojans in the next book assault and carry the walls which the Greeks

have built to defend their ships. The ships are on the point of being burnt, when the sea god, the enemy of the Trojans, comes from his mountain throne in Samothrace to help the Greeks. Splendid is the description of his coming. He yokes to his chariot horses brazen hoofed, with flowing manes of gold. He puts on golden raiment, and takes his golden lash. He drives over the ocean waves. The finny monsters frisk round him from their caverns, and recognize their king. The sea cleaves asunder with joy, and his brazen axle is not wetted. The Greeks are rallied; Hector is driven back. War, tumult, and death rage through this book and the next. Zeus, the king of gods and men, has as yet held the balance even, and forbidden the other deities to intermingle in the fray. But Hera, his queen, is a partisan of the Greeks, and she exercises her powers of charming, till Zeus sleeps, and the deities each betake themselves to the field. The whole description—the cave of sleep—the power of love over the mighty Zeus—the grateful offerings of the earth to his genial bed, are full of the richest and freshest beauty.

Book XIII.

Book XIV.

He spoke, and round his spouse divine his eager arms he threw;
Beneath them earth her herbage fresh, and choicest flowrets grew;
The Lotus-blossom full of dew, the crocus bright with gold,
The many-flowered hyacinth with stem erect and bold;
And thus they lay together, and the sacred place was filled
With a bright and veiling cloud from which ambrosial dews distilled.*

* The reader will be reminded of the glorious description of our first parents in Paradise, in which allusion is made to this passage of Homer:

So spake our general mother, and with eyes
Of conjugal attraction unreproved,
And meek surrender, half embracing leaned
On our first father; half her swelling breast
Naked met his, under the flowing gold
Of her loose tresses hid; he in delight
Both of her beauty and submissive charms,
Smiled with superior love, as Jupiter
On Juno smiles, when he impregns the clouds
That shed Mayflowers;—and prest her matron lip
With kisses pure.

Paradise Lost, Book IV.

Book XVI. But let us hasten on to a part thick with gems of poetry. At length Achilles, moved by the entreaties of his friend Patroclus, rather than with the distress of the Greeks, consents to give him his own invincible armour, and to send him forth to the fight. He arms his soldiers, the Myrmidons, who, for strength and eagerness, are compared to mountain wolves insatiate in blood, and wasps defending their nests. The Trojans fly from the ships, as a cloud rolls down from the mountain on the coming of a storm. They are routed and slain, and among them Sarpedon, the son of Zeus himself, is killed by the hand of Patroclus, but the avenger is overtaken by vengeance, and the slayer slain. He had been warned before setting out, by Achilles, not to approach the walls of Troy. This warning he neglects, and at last becomes embroiled with the mighty Hector himself. Patroclus had slain Cebriones, the half brother and charioteer of Hector. The two heroes were fighting over the body, like lions over the body of a hart.

As when the East wind and the South with meeting fury strive
Amidst some mountain's fastnesses, the forest trunks to rive,
The beech and ash, and cornel-tree their lofty branches bow,
And crash their limbs together; so the Greeks and Trojans now
Rushed one upon another, and forgot the thought of fear.
Around the body of the chief full many a barbed spear
Stuck fast, and winged arrows that had leapt from many a string;
And many a weighty stone was heard upon the shield to ring;
But he amidst the whirl of dust, a mighty form, was laid,
Forgetful of his warlike skill, in calm of death arrayed.

Book XVII. Patroclus falls, but by the hand of Hector, and with the help of Apollo. The whole of the next book (Book XVII) is taken up by the fight over his body, and the carrying it out of the field, and the conveying the mournful message to Achilles. His passion of grief and rage is nobly described: his goddess mother comes to comfort him, persuades him to avenge his friend; and promises him another and a better suit of armour, made by the divine hands of Hephæstus, the heavenly workman. Meantime, the furious Hector and his Trojans have pursued the band bearing the body of Patroclus, and it is in

danger again of falling into the hands of the enemy. Iris, the messenger of heaven, is sent to Achilles, and persuades him to come forth in his strength, and scatter the Trojans. Athena, or Pallas, throws round him her immortal shield;

And like a crown the goddess threw a vapour round his head
Distinct with golden rays, from which a flame of glory spread.
As when the smoke goes up to heaven from some far inland town,
When deadly battle in the streets is raging up and down,
And as the light of day declines, from many beacon fires
Up to the darkening heaven the flames shoot up in forky spires,
A signal to the dwellers near to bring their timely aid:—
So rose the heavenly flame in air around Achilles' head.

At the sight of him the Trojans fly in dismay, and the mournful corse of his friend is brought in and laid on a bier, and washed, and wept over by himself and his companions.

But now the heavenly arms are being fabricated, and the shield, on which divine art was lavished, is described in verses of exquisite beauty: Book XVIII

And first he wrought a mighty shield of solid work entire,
With care inlaid on every side; and round, a shining tyre,
Triple, and glorious; and besides a belt of silver bright;
Five-fold he made the inner shield, with cunning skill bedight.
In it he wrought the earth and heaven, and ocean's brimming tide,
The sun's unwearied strength, the moon with monthly light supplied:
And all the constellations bright wherewith the heaven is set,
Orion, and the northern wain, in ocean never wet.

* * * * * * *

In it he wrought two cities; in the one were marriage songs,
And feastings; from the chambers came the brides in joyful throngs,
By light of festal torches; and the youths were dancing round
To music of the flute and pipe, and harps tumultuous sound;
While at the doors admiring stood their women and their sires.

* * * * * * *

In it he wrought a fallow field where plowers many a one
Were plowing, and whene'er their yokes came back where they begun,
A brimming cup was reached to them of honey-tasted wine,
Which having drunk they turned again along the furrowed line.

* * * * * * *

In it he wrought the harvest-time; and in the yellow land

The youths were reaping, holding sharp bright sickles in their hand;
Some handfuls fall along the rows, and some the shearers bind;
And boys were gathering up the gleanings following on behind.
A sceptred king among them stood surveying their employ;
And some prepared beneath an oak the feast of harvest joy.

Book XIX. These and many others are the wonders of the shield; and
Book XX. with this, and the rest of the arms, Achilles goes forth, knowing that his course will be short, but glorious. The gods now mingle unrestrainedly in the fight; and the combat assumes a
Book XXI. higher and more awful cast. Hector flies, and is only saved by Apollo from the wrath of his foe. Not content with mortal foes, the hero engages with the river Scamander, the offspring of the gods, who rises in defence of his Trojans to overwhelm their destroyer. He flies before the rushing waters; the river pursues where he flies; till at last Hera, fearing for her Greeks and their chief, beseeches the fire god, who burns up the river. This scene, wild and supernatural as it is, is told grandly and appropriately; the personality and power given to inanimate things is mysteriously shadowed out, and an impression of awe and terror left on the mind of the reader.

Book XXII. The next book completes the glory of Achilles. His great foe, the slayer of his friend, is slain by him, and dragged round the walls of Troy at the wheels of his
Book XXIII chariot. This being accomplished, he performs the funeral rites to his yet unburied friend, and institutes solemn games over his tomb.

Book XXIV. But strikingly beautiful is the close of this wonderful poem. The aged Priam, the disconsolate sire of Hector, comes to the fiery Achilles to beg his body. The sacred corse has been preserved many days miraculously—the wounds have been healed—the blood is washed by unseen hands. The meeting of age and youth, helplessness and strength, sorrow and fury, is powerfully related by this great master of human feelings. The savage warrior is melted; the sad father bears back his son, the last defence of Troy—the pile is lit; the sacred rites performed; and the action ceases, with

'Twas thus they wrought the burial rites of Hector good and true.

Thus ends a poem, which in very many respects, most deserves the admiration of mankind of all that have ever been composed. It raises a trifling piratical war into a subject of deep and lasting interest. It invests men of no historical importance with undying names. It arrests the grandeur and beauty of nature, and in a few short words or lines raises up a thousand images in the soul. It deals alike with the majestic and the minute, the terrible and the pathetic; and in its dealings with all these, stands unrivalled. From scenes of promiscuous bloodshed, and superhuman fury, to pictures of domestic tenderness, the master's hand is alike seen in all which he touches or describes. Excellence of the Iliad.

It has one faculty, which belongs to none but the greatest productions of human genius, and the inspired writings, that of appearing more beautiful, the oftener it is read.

From this book the sages of Ancient Greece took their maxims and morals; her warriors their tactics, and her statesmen their politics. There is no poet who has not drawn from this source; the incidents of the Iliad, and the legends which have been built on them, have formed an inexhaustible fund for dramatic plots, lyric allusions, and superstructure of new epic poems; the similes have furnished many very beautiful descriptive sketches, which have been worked up, and are even now worked up, by modern artists in verse.

In our next chapter we shall give a similar sketch of the Odyssey; a poem not holding so high a place as the Iliad, but likely, from reasons which we shall then explain, always to be a greater favourite. Meantime we will take leave of our readers with the following sonnet, which occurred to us while ruminating on the subject of this chapter:

Ilion, along whose streets in olden days
Shone that divinest form, for whose sweet face
A monarch sire, with all his kingly race,
Were too content to let their temples blaze—
Where art thou now?—no massive columns raise

Their serried shafts to heaven; we may not trace
Xanthus and Simois, nor each storied place
Round which poetic memory fondly plays.
But in the verse of the old man divine
Thy windy towers are built eternally;
Nor shall the ages, as they ruin by,
Print on thy bulwarks one decaying sign;
So true is beauty clothed in endless rime;
So false the sensual monuments of time.

CHAPTER III.

HOMER—THE ODYSSEY.

Points of difference from the Iliad.

We observed in the last chapter, that the Odyssey has many points of difference from the Iliad. These must now be more specially detailed. In the first place, the subject and style are widely different. The Iliad is full of fields of battle, deeds of heroes, and the struggles of human passion. The Odyssey, on the other hand, relates the endeavours of a weary traveller to reach his beloved home, through perils by the adverse powers of nature. The Iliad abounds with images of dread and majesty: the Odyssey with exquisite pastoral descriptions of sea and land and sky, and the works of men, gardens and palaces, farms and cities. The Iliad seems to partake more of the severe truth of patriarchal days, when the first fathers of men, mighty in stature and heart, were still in fulness of power and strength of will. The Odyssey belongs rather to the middle age of imaginative legend; its creations are all mingled with the fanciful and grotesque; it remembers, not relates, mighty deeds and passions; it takes its rise from an age when men and actions stand prominently forth, and in which we can imagine ourselves to be living and doing, and getting in its course more unreal and mysterious, it at last fades off into a region dim and unknown. In the Iliad, the mightier emotions bear rule, and the softer parts of humanity serve them, and are crushed beneath them: in the Odyssey the love of home, of parent, wife and child, is ever before us, and weaves through adventure and fable its golden thread.

The Iliad is a poem to be admired: the Odyssey to be enjoyed. The Iliad requires study, and repays it: the Odyssey pleases at sight, and leaves an impression which never needs to be renewed. The Iliad is the treasury of subjects for the sons of art: the Odyssey delights and soothes the simple-minded children of nature. In youth and adventure, in the intervals of study, by summer seas and on mountain forests, the Odyssey is our companion: many a golden thought, many a sweet verse, many a pleasant selection of retreats where our soul has breathed and grown, do we owe to its influence; but we keep the Iliad for the food of maturer years and book-peopled seclusion; for maxims of practical wisdom, which we reverence ourselves, and recite to our children. The pulpit, the bar, the highest minds in every department, have all been beholden to the Iliad: from the Odyssey we have poets such as Theocritus and Virgil, Spenser and Ariosto, Keats and Tennyson.

Such is the poem, whose treasures we are about to lay before our readers.

At the opening of the action the various parties in it are situated as follows:—

Opening of the action.

ODYSSEUS, (our readers will pardon our adherence to the genuine name, and rejection of our schoolboy adoption of the Latin form *Ulysses*,) the wisest of the Grecian chiefs who had fought at Troy, having suffered many misfortunes on his return home, is detained in an island of the sea by the nymph Calypso, who wishes him to live ever with her, and offers him the gift of immortality to compensate for his loss of home. This he refuses, and sits on the enchanted rocks looking over the broad sea,

> Longing to see the smoke curl up from his own house at home.

Meantime, in that house at home, his faithful wife Penelope is beset with a multitude of unruly suitors for her hand in marriage. Nearly twenty years had elapsed since her husband had left his home. Yet she maintains her conjugal faith;

and answering the suitors that she would choose one of them as soon as she should have finished a shroud of her old father-in-law Laertes, unweaves each night what she had woven by day.

In this aspect of affairs, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, descends in a borrowed shape to urge Telemachus, the son of Odysseus and Penelope, to go and seek his father. Hermes also, the heavenly messenger, is despatched to the island of Calypso, to command her no longer to detain Odysseus, for that it was fated that he should return to his home.

The first message and its results are related in the first four books. Books I—IV

The goddess arrives at Ithaca, and finds the following state of things:—

Before the gates she found the suitors thronging,
Busy at dice; reclined on hides of oxen
Which their own waste had slain. Heralds and servants
Mingled their wine-drink in the ample goblets,
Or with soft sponges washed the marble tables,
And served the meats, and laid on lavish dainties.
Telemachus first saw the entering goddess:
Heart-sad he sat among the crowded suitors,
Looking with Fancy's eye on his dear father,
Thinking if ever he would come and scatter
These insolents, and get his household honour,
And rule his own again. The prince, thus thinking,
Beheld Athena: up he rose and straightway
Made for the porch; for his high spirit smote him,
To see the stranger stand so long unnoticed.

The stranger is introduced; the advice is given; the guest departs, and in departing does wondrously, and is known to be divine. Meantime the suitors are sitting over their wine, listening to the voice of a bard, who is singing to them the mournful tale of Troy. The sound comes to Penelope in her retirement:

In chamber far above, the tuneful story
Reached the sad queen; she moving forth descended
The ample palace-stair; on each side girded
By a fair slave. She reached the polished doorway

Of the great hall, and stood before the suitors,
With glistening veil her modest cheeks concealing.
Then shedding tears she called the heavenly minstrel:
Phemius, thou knowest many a soothing measure
Of deeds of gods and men, which bards delight in:
From them sing any, and let these in silence
Sit by and drink; but cease me that sad story,
Which harrows my poor heart: such mindful sorrow
Keep I for my dear lord, whose name and glory
Is wide in Hellas, and the midst of Argos.

Next day a stormy discussion is held. Telemachus proposes his journey to the suitors: they rage against him: but he is defended by heavenly assistance; and shows no fear of them.

Listen, ye suitors, overbearing varlets,

Is his exordium to them.

The journey is now prepared: the suitors consent, hoping that the youth may perish. It is necessary to the reader's acquaintance with the *manners* of this charming poem, that we give entire the scene in which Telemachus breaks the matter to his old nurse before his going:

Meanwhile the prince sought out his father's chamber,
High-roofed and vast, wherein lay hoarded treasure
Of gold and silver, and of costly garments
Put by in chests: and scented oil of olive.
Here ample casks of old sweet wine were standing
Ranged by the wall, each full of godlike liquor,
If ever their lost lord, at length returning
After his toils, his mighty soul should comfort.
Each was twice locked; and in the chamber dwelling
An ancient woman kept them in her wisdom,
The prince's nurse, the faithful Eurycleia.
Her called Telemachus, and thus addrest her:
'Mother, come pour me out some wine in goblets,
'The best and sweetest, next to that which always
'Thou keepest sealed for my poor father's coming.
'Fill goblets twelve, and fit them all with covers;
'And pack me meal in skins, full twenty measures.
'Do it thyself alone, and all together;
'For I shall come to fetch it forth this even,

'Soon as my mother goes into her chamber.
'For I am bound to Sparta and to Pylos,
'To hear some tidings of my absent father.'
She shriek'd, and weeping, with swift words addrest him:
'Wherefore, dear child, has this design come on thee?
'Why shouldst thou wish to go so long a journey,
'And all alone, my darling? Thy poor father
'Hath perished long ago, far from his country
'In some strange land: and now, while thou art going,
'These suitors will be plotting mischief for thee,
'That thou may'st die, and they divide thy substance.
'Stay here and keep thine own; 'tis not for thee, child,
'On the fierce sea to suffer, and to wander.'
The modest youth his nurse with mildness answered:
'Take courage, mother; not without high counsel
'Given by a god, has this resolve been taken.
'Now swear, of all this nought to tell my mother,
'Till the eleventh or twelfth day be accomplished,
'Or till she pine, or hear of me by rumour;
'Swear, that thou may'st not bring my wrath upon thee.'
He spoke, and swore the matron to be secret.
Then she drew off the wine into the goblets,
And poured the meal into the well-sewn bottles.
The prince departing, mingled with the suitors.

But the Odyssey, of all poems, is the poem of the sea. All the fine moderns who have sung of 'the sea, the sea,' have never, in one point, equalled the grandeur and freshness of this old bard. Vandevelde and Claude have approached the nearest. Reader, did you ever see Claude's picture of the embarkation of the eleven thousand virgins, or of the debarkation of the Queen of Sheba? If not, you cannot do it too soon:* if you have, remember, or treasure for next time, the wonders of the sea in those pictures. Look into the water in them; it is not, it cannot be painting: the waves have depths! Look longer; do you not see the treasures of the deep? You may fancy so. Look at the glorious sun reflected in the twinkling waves; in fragments thickening and lessening as

* They are among the treasures of the National Gallery. If any one has an hour to spare in London, let him spend it there. He will never regret it.

you follow them further off, till they blend, and become a pillar of golden light. But what is all this to Homer? Listen, and you shall hear.

Telemachus embarked, but first Athena
Led him the way; together in the steerage
They sat: the crew let loose the vessel's moorings,
And stepped on board, and sat upon her benches.
Athena raised a gentle breeze behind them,
Murmuring soft music o'er the ruffled waters.
The prince bespoke the crew to raise their tackling;
They heard, and straightway in th' appointed hollow
Set up the fir-tree mast, and bound it safely;
Then stretched the white sails by the twisted sheet-ropes.
Tight swelled the mainsail, with the fresh breeze straining;
Around the prow the troubled waves fell crashing;
The ship ran onward, ploughing through the ocean.
The crew laid by their oars along the vessel,
And with sweet wine-draughts crowned their foaming beakers,
Pouring libations to the powers immortal,
But most of all to the grey-eyed Athena.
All night and dawn the gallant ship went onward;
Till from the circle of the mighty waters
Up sprung the Sun-god on the sky's bright pathway,
O'er heaven and earth his full effulgence shedding.

Thus they come to the sandy Pylos, the city of the aged Nestor, who, after his toils at Troy, had been permitted to reach home in safety; and now, with his sons and people, was doing a great sacrifice to the god of the sea. They were assembled by hundreds on the shore; and the voyagers, after joining them in the sacrifice, are hospitably entertained, and treated with much gossip, but very little information, from the good old story-telling Nestor. The goddess having again departed miraculously, and thus infused confidence into the old man respecting the fortunes of Telemachus, he is lodged there that night; and in the morning, after a great sacrifice which Nestor had vowed to Athena, and when (such was the primitive chastity of patriarchal manners,) Nestor's youngest daughter, the lovely princess Polycasta, had attended Telemachus in the bath, and anointed and adorned him, he is sent on

his way, accompanied by Peisistratus, one of the young princes, for Lacedæmon, to enquire further of Menelaus, who had also gained his home, after much wandering and danger.

They reach Lacedæmon on the second evening. It seems to be their fate to arrive in holiday-time. Menelaus is giving a marriage feast on the double occasion of his daughter Hermione (by Helen) being given to Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, and his son Megapenthes taking a Spartan wife. The guests are seen arriving by the servants, and as usual, hospitably received.

> Some loosed the foaming horses from their chariot,
> And bound them to the mangers; placing by them
> Heaps of white corn; some took the car and leant it
> Against the shining walls. Others the strangers
> Ushered within the palace; they beholding
> Looked with amazement on the kingly mansion.
> For as the sun or moon in all their glory,
> So shone the lofty walls of Menelaus,
> With gold and silver, ivory and amber.

It was the ancient custom to feed one's guests first, and ask them questions afterwards. During the feast, and before Telemachus is known, upon his dropping an admiring expression to his friend of the splendour around him, and being overheard, Menelaus begins recounting to him the toils and dangers by which this wealth was gotten, and the expense of precious lives which had attended the Trojan expedition. Here occurs again one of those sweet touches of nature, which are never so pure and fresh as in these ancient bards. Menelaus is speaking:

> I reign not gladly o'er these bright possessions;
> How could I wish the greater part denied me,
> If those men could be safe again, who perished
> Under the walls of Troy, far from their country.
> But though I wail for all my brave companions,
> None do I mourn so much as one, whose memory
> Poisons my sleep and food; none like Odysseus
> Wrought for the Greeks at Troy; but fate had treasured
> Sorrows for him, and for me sad remembrance.

Long years hath he been missing, and we know not
If he be dead, or live;—the old Laertes
His sire, and wise Penelope, deserted
Mourn for him, and his son, left young behind him.
At this, a rush of grief for his poor father
Came on the youth; the warm tears trickled from him;
With both his hands his purple robe he lifted,
And hid his face.

This leads to his discovery, and much talk and lamentation takes place over the long-lost Odysseus.

But here more is learnt respecting him. Menelaus during his wanderings has fallen in with Proteus, the prophetic old man of the sea. Of him he has enquired many things, and learned the fate of most of the Grecian chieftains who had left Troy. Among other information, he has been told that Odysseus was detained in the island of Calypso.* Having gained this intelligence, Telemachus departs, laden with gifts by the bounty of his host. But the search is not followed up; nor do we hear any more of Telemachus, till long after in the poem, when we find Athena going to fetch him from Lacedæmon on the arrival of his father in Ithaca. She, however, does not tell him this, but alarms him by a report that his mother is on the point of marrying Eurymachus, the most powerful of the suitors, and that his return is instantly necessary. He departs with good wishes and omens; hastens to his ship at Pylos, escapes the ambush laid for him in an intervening island by the suitors, and arrives safe on the shore of Ithaca.

Meanwhile the greater part of the action of the Poem has been passing. Between the arrival of Telemachus at Lacedæ-

* Some lines of exquisite beauty occur respecting the fate of Menelaus himself:—

It is not fated, godlike Menelaus,
That thou shouldst die and suffer change in Argos;
But to th' Elysian plain, earth's furthest limits,
The gods shall send thee, where men's life is sweetest:
There never snow nor winter comes, nor tempest;
But from mild ocean ever breathes the zephyr
Life and refreshment;—and this, for that Helen
Thou hast to wife, and art by Zeus beloved.

mon and his return, ten books have intervened, full of strange adventures, hair-breadth escapes, and "moving accidents by flood and field," of the hero, Odysseus.

The fifth book opens with the message of Hermes, the heavenly messenger, which was to command Calypso to set Odysseus free. The poet has reached the full subject of his work. Hitherto all has been foreground and sky. Now he comes to his central figures, and lavishes design and colouring. The King of Gods and men has been commanding Hermes to go: Book V.

He spoke: nor paused the swift immortal herald,
But bound beneath his feet his winged sandals,
Golden, eternal; which o'er ocean bear him,
And o'er the fields of earth, swift as the tempest.
He took his staff, with which he charms men's eyelids
Whene'er he will, or wakes them from their slumbers.
With this in hand, the god began his journey,
And reached Pieria; then from air betook him
To flight athwart the waters; in the likeness
Of a sea-bird he skimmed along the surface,
A gull, which in the trenches of the billows
Fishing, its thick wings wets with the salt water;
Thus flew the god across the myriad breakers.
Then when the island, seen from far, drew nearer,
He left the sea, and on the firm land journeyed,
Till a vast cave he reached, in which the goddess
Dwelt in her beauty; there within he found her;
Upon the hearth a mighty fire was kindled;
And from afar there spread across the island
The smell of cedar and of sandal burning;
She sat within, with her clear voice loud singing,
With golden threads a web of wool inweaving.
Around the cave a lofty wood was growing,
Alder, and poplar, and the scented cypress.
There roosted long-winged birds, or plumed their feathers,
Night-hawks and falcons, cormorants, whose business
Is in the waters. Round the smooth-worn entrance,
Climbed a lush grape-vine, black with pendant clusters:
Hard by, four fountains poured their limpid waters,
Each near another, but four courses taking.
And from the cave's mouth stretched away fair meadows,

Rank with sweet violet, and the crisped parsley.
There might a god stand still and gaze with rapture,
As did the Herald of the heavenly council.
The cave he entered; the divine Calypso
Saw him, and knew; for by the powers immortal
Each is to other known by swift perception.
He found not there within great-souled Odysseus;
For he sat weeping on the shore; where always
Wearing his heart with tears, and groans, and sorrows,
Homeward he looked across the foaming waters.

The message is delivered, to the dismay of the love-sick nymph, who is however unable to disobey the will of Zeus and of Fate. By her suggestions, Odysseus turns Robinson Crusoe, and builds him a raft, wherewith to pass homeward: and (for she is a faithful, though a dissappointed lover) she loads him with good things, and raises a fair breeze behind him. Thus far (as we have it in the fairy legends) her power extended; but a mightier than she, even the god of the sea himself, was Odysseus' foe.

The gods had a habit of going to dine with the Æthiopians, a sort of Elysian people, who dwelt in the mysterious birth-places of the Nile. The sea god, Poseidon, (so call him) was a frequent guest at their banquets: and when Odysseus, now sailing on the eighteenth day, was coming in sight of a mountain shore, the land of the Phæacians, Poseidon was returning from his Coptic debauch, and spied the unfortunate wanderer, as his horses were walking up a steep hill, from whence he looked over the ocean. Having vented his wrath in a speech which amounts to

Fe, fi, fo, fum,
I smell the blood of a Grecian man,

he proceeds to concoct mischief for Odysseus.

He spoke, and from his stores the clouds he gathered;
And stirred the ocean with his mighty trident.
At once the breaths of all the winds he wakened;
Clouds covered earth and sea, and night came downward
Over the louring heaven. Great waves rolled onward;
Fear seized Odysseus, and a fainting terror.

neaven

akes

read or heard of but here. Hear it, ye bathers in our eddying Trent—ye vaunters of your half mile or mile—*two days and two nights* did Odysseus swim; then, to be sure, he had a patent life-preserver, and we are told his patroness Athena boxed up all the winds except the right one; but any how it is a 'strong bathe;' why, his flesh must have been sodden like boiled mutton, or a washerwoman's fingers.

In this state he arrives at the land of the Phæacians, a far-famed naval people. Having been much beaten about by the waves in landing, and his life being in danger, he is rescued by the favour of Athena, but still he lies fainting on the beach. Having recovered, he throws back to the sea his magic girdle, and Leucothea receives it beneath the waters. He then retreats into a wood from the river, at whose mouth he had landed, and having made him a bed of leaves, sleeps sweetly after his labours.

Book VI. Meantime an adventure was being prepared for him. The King of the country, Alcinous, has a fair daughter named Nausicaa. Athena comes to her in disguise, and reminds her of her many splendid dresses, which were lying neglected. She tells her that in the course of things her marriage cannot be far off, and then she will have to array herself and maids in the best and purest.

In those days princely maidens neither put out their washing, nor did they wash at home. The fashion was for the mistress and her train to go to some fair place by a river, and make a day of it. Such a washing day did Athena advise Nausicaa to take. The mules were to be put to, and the whole company to set off in the morning for the river.* This is accordingly done. The whole wardrobe is held in the

* There is a far-famed comparison respecting Nausicaa and her attendants:

> And as the Huntress-queen among the mountains,
> Taygetus' long ridge, or Erimanthus,
> Disports herself, boars and swift stags pursuing;
> And the Nymphs with her in the field, Jove's daughters,
> Are playing, and her mother's heart rejoiceth,
> For far above the rest her clear brow shineth

running water, beaten, and rinsed, and spread to dry on the sea beach. All this of course happens at the same place where Odysseus had laid him down; and when it is over, and the fair company had also bathed in the fresh stream, and were playing at ball, he wakes, and creeps forth from his hiding place. The maid-servants shriek, and fly in dismay; the princess alone, from a higher chastity, remains, being besides strengthened in her resolves by Athena. The traveller tells his tale—is accommodated with clothes and food, and directed to the city.

There his patroness Athena meets him under the form of a girl bearing a pitcher, and informs him of all he can want to know. He passes the arsenals and stores, and at length arrives at the palace of Alcinous. That our readers may know what sort of a thing a Homeric palace is, we shall translate the description complete. Book VII.

Straight to the palace gate advanced Odysseus;
Much wondering, before he reached the threshold;
For as the sun or moon in all their glory
So shone the lofty roofs. The walls were brazen,
Reaching on either side the inner chambers;
Bright steel the coping. Golden doors defended
The inner mansion, cased in silver doorways
On thresholds of bright brass, with golden latches.
On either side sat gold and silver mastiffs,
Whom the sage fire-god by his skill created,
Of living metal, scathless and immortal,
To guard the palace of Phæacia's monarch.
In the great hall along the walls were benches,
Spread with bright patterns, broidered by the needle.

And ye may know her well, though all are lovely;
So 'midst her fair attendants shone the princess.

Another exquisite passage describes the departure of Athena to Olympus, the heaven of the Homeric deities:

Thus having said, the grey-eyed goddess vanished
For high Olympus, where the gods dwell ever
In bliss and safety; never is it shaken
By winds, nor wet with rain; nor float the snow-flakes
Near to its top; but ether pure and cloudless
Is spread above, and lambent light plays round it,
There day by day the gods in bliss are dwelling.

There sat the rulers of the people, feasting
From day to day; for they have all in plenty.
On pedestals ranged round stood golden statues
With torch in hand, to light the mighty banquet.
Inside the house were fifty female servants.
Some ground the mealy corn upon the millstones,
Some, sitting, wove the web and turned the spindle;
For as of all mankind Phæacian rowers
Are skilled in swiftness; so in cunning patterns
Excel the women; for divine Athena
Gave them the gift, and filled their hearts with wisdom.
Without the palace gates a spacious orchard
Stretched, on both sides by a straight fence surrounded.
Here lofty fruit trees grew, pear, and pomegranate,
And golden-fruited apple; fig, and olive.
Of these the fruit decayeth not, nor faileth
Winter nor summer, but the year round lasteth;
For the bland zephyr breatheth ever on them,
Opending the bloom, or setting them, or mellowing.
In lavish heaps each luscious fruit was ripening.
Thence passing on, a thick well ordered vineyard
Was planted: one warm side sloped to the southward
Catching the sun's full rays; the busy labourers
Cropped the dark grapes, or trod them in the winepress.
Yet were the vines clad with unready bunches,
Shedding the flower, or dark'ning into purple.
Beyond the utmost row, trim beds were planted
With herbs and flowers, throughout the seasons blooming:
And in the midst two fountains; one, which parted
In many channels, trickles through the garden;
Another, which is led beneath the palace
To a fair conduit, whence the townsmen draw it.
Such was the wealth of the Phæacian monarch;
Here gazed, admiring, the divine Odysseus.

He enters: supplicates the queen: is received, fed, questioned; promised a convoy to his country, be it never so far off; and all this before knowing who, or whence he is. This was the ancient way of treating guests. At length the queen, seeing him clad in garments of her own working, elicits from him an account of his arrival in the country.

On the morrow his convoy is to be ready. In the morning the king makes a feast for his nobles. The blind bard, Demodocus, is called, and sings the tale, how Achilles and Odysseus once had high words at a banquet, and from that day began the misery of the Greeks. Book VIII.

Thus sung the bard renowned; but sad Odysseus,
Folding his hands in his long robe of purple,
Lifted its skirts, and hid his manly visage.
For shame came on him, and thick tears were falling.
Whene'er the minstrel paused amid his singing,
He wiped his tears and shewed his face uncovered,
And poured libations from the mighty goblets;
But when again the lords of the Phæacians
Besought the minstrel to begin his singing,
Loving to hear the strain, again Odysseus
Covered his countenance and wept in silence.
The others saw him not; but the good monarch
Sat near, and saw; and thus bespoke his nobles:
'Hear me, Phæacian rulers; this our banquet
'Hath feasted every soul, and the sweet music,
'Which waits on festal days. Now let us practise
'Our manly games; that to his friends the stranger
'May tell at home, how we excel the nations
'In boxing, wrestling, leaping, and the foot-race.'
He spoke, and led the way; the nobles followed.

Then follow the games, in which they have a mind to surprise the stranger, and rally him on his apparent inaptness for manly exercises. This rouses his spirit, and he throws a vast quoit far beyond their utmost limits, and challenges them one and all to any athletic exercise except running, in which he says he fears he is not very well practised, having lived amidst the perils of the sea. It appearing that they have 'caught a Tartar,' Alcinous changes the subject, and proposes a song from Demodocus,* and after that, a trial of skill in dancing: Book IX.

That to his friends the stranger
May tell at home how we excel all others
In the gay dance and strains of heavenly music.

* This song bears marks of being of a much later date than the rest of the Odyssey.

They return after these entertainments, and in the palace Odysseus begs Demodocus to sing the song of the horse of Troy. This again touches the tender chord, and the song is stopped. The curiosity of the Phæacians is no longer to be checked, and the claims of hospitality have been fully satisfied. The king therefore asks him who he is, and whence he comes, and why he weeps at the tale of Troy. Then Odysseus begins and recites his adventures:

> Odysseus is my name, son of Laertes;
> In skill and craft the rest of men I conquer;
> Far as the spreading heaven my glory reaches.
> My home is Ithaca: an island mountain
> Makes it conspicuous o'er the western ocean;
> Around it thickly lie green islands scattered,
> Dulichium, Same, and the woody Zante;
> But it lies farthest to the West, beyond them,
> Rocky and bare but mother of good warriors.
> This island-home, to me of lands the sweetest,
> Fain would I see; the nymph, divine Calypso,
> In her smooth caverns wooed me for her husband;
> As did the enchantress Circe in her palace;
> But never could they turn my stedfast purpose.
> For to a wandering man on earth or ocean
> Nought is more sweet than his dear home and parents.
> But hear ye now my long distressful voyage,
> Which the stern Fates apportioned me from Ilion.

Then follow four books of the traveller's narrative, rich in incident and description,—models for story-tellers of all ages. These, with the remaining part of the Odyssey, will furnish us with matter for another chapter.

Meanwhile we would beg our readers whom these our essays may have interested, not to imagine that we are about to treat every poem which we shall notice, at as much length as we have done these two. These are the greatest extant monuments of human genius. Even the course of the ordinary narrative in them is full of points of beauty, which no popular poetical critic could allow himself to pass over. So that necessarily our chapters on the Iliad and Odyssey are little more than *arguments,* or tables of contents, with occasional

translations interspersed. Where the design is unapparent, and the work fragmentary, much of the taste of a commentator is superseded; and where the hoar of extreme antiquity has hallowed the edifice, criticism is awed into silence.

Let us come into the company of the herd of poets, and, great and glorious spirits though they be, we shall breathe more freely, and judge less sparingly; but—there again, as sure as we look up, that grand old bust, blind and fillet-bound, is looking on us as we are writing; it is the concentration of human majesty, the type of the age of heroes; surely it has descended, with the poems, to bless our libraries with its venerable presence; and, be the critic's doubts what they may, that brow meditated, that mouth uttered, these ancient songs.

Reader, examine as thou wilt—judge as thou canst—convince as thou mayest,—but in thy 'heart of hearts' never call in question the identity or truth of THE IDEAL HOMER!

CHAPTER IV.

THE ODYSSEY.

He bade me tell it—
Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field;
Of hair-breadth 'scapes i'th' imminent deadly breach;
Of being taken by the insolent foe,
And sold to slavery: of my redemption thence,
And portance in my travels' history;
Wherein of antres vast, and deserts wild,
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven
It was my hint to speak, such was the process;
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.

Book IX. THUS spoke Othello, and thus also Odysseus. We left him reciting his history before the court of Alcinous. First, he tells them, the wind bore him from Troy on the coast of the Ciconians; where, by what right he does not say, (for piracy and robbery were honourable in those days,) he destroyed a city, and carried off the women and goods, having slain the male inhabitants. He seems to have been cursed with very injudicious companions: for after this exploit he cannot persuade them to set sail with their booty, but they will fain stay there and enjoy it. This draws down the vengeance of the neighbours; and he loses the first instalment of his friends, in number six from each ship. He proceeds—

Thence sailed we, grieving in our inmost spirit,
Though safe ourselves, for loss of our dear comrades.
Nor did the ships depart, before in order
To each lost friend farewell had thrice been spoken.

Very beautiful is the next adventure, and very beautifully has it been enlarged upon by one who might be the greatest poet

of the coming age—Alfred Tennyson. We shall make no scruple of quoting largely from his admirable poem, the Lotos-eaters; no translation of ours could equal the rich melody of the following stanzas:

'Courage,' he said, and pointed toward the land,
'This mountain wave will roll us shoreward soon.'
In the afternoon they came unto a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full faced above the valley stood the moon;*
And, like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall, and pause, and fall did seem.

A land of streams—some like a downward smoke,
Slow dropping veils of thinnest lawn did go;
And some through wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumberous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river's sea-ward flow
From the inner land: far off, three mountain tops,
Three thunder-cloven thrones of oldest snow,
Stood sunset-flush'd: and, dew'd with showery drops,
Upclomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

The charmed sunset lingered low adown
In the red West; through mountain clefts the dale
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down
Bordered with palm, and many a winding vale
And meadow, set with slender galingale;—
A land where all things always seemed the same!
And round about the keel, with faces pale,
Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,
The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came.

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,
Laden with flowers and fruit, whereof they gave
To each; but whoso did receive of them,
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave

* In the printed copy, "About the valley burned the golden moon;" we much prefer the line in the text, which was in the original MS.

Far far away did seem to mourn and rave
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;
And deep asleep he seemed, yet all awake,
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

They sat them down upon the yellow sand
Between the sun and moon upon the shore;
And sweet it was to dream of Father-land,
Of child, and wife, and slave; but evermore
Most weary seemed the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then some one said, 'We will return no more:'
And all at once they sang, 'Our island home
Is far beyond the wave: we will no longer roam.'

The resolve however is broken, for Odysseus forces them into their ships, and binds them to their benches; ordering those who had not tasted the Lethean fruit to make all way. The burden of the adventures recurs after each with melancholy sound;

Thence we sailed further, grieving in our spirits.

And this time well they might, for their next sojourn is with a host who does not dine with them, but dines off them—even the well known Cyclops. Here is the description of them and their land:

Thence to the region of the haughty Cyclops
Came we, who trusting to their yearly produce
Sow not the land, nor plough; but without labour
Grow all things for them, wheat and plenteous barley,
And vines which bear them wine in swelling bunches,
Dew'd by the rain of heaven. No markets have they,
Nor full assemblies, nor the seats of justice;
But on the heads of lofty mountains dwell they,
In hollow caves; they make their laws and customs
Each for his own, and care not for another.
Before the harbour of the land, an island
Lies off, hard by, and wooded; here are running
Wild goats unnumbered; for no human footstep
Scares them, nor chase of hunter; on the mountain

They range at pleasure. There no folds nor shepherds
Are seen, nor tillage; for the Cyclops build not
Sea-passing ships, to wander to far regions;
Good is the island, and each fruit would render
In its due season: to the shore fair meadows
Reach down, soft, and well watered, fit for vineyards.
Smooth is the soil; deep crops would tire the reaper.
A well locked harbour is there, where no mooring
Is needed, nor to cast the steadying anchor,
But one may land, and wait the seaward breezes.
At the creek-head a spring of clearest water
Flows from a cave, edged round with wavy poplars.
Thither we sailed, as some kind Power directed,
In the dark night; nor could we see before us,
For a thick mist had closed around our vessel,
Nor did the moon shine out, but clouds concealed her.
None knew that land was near; nor did the breakers
Show their white foam, until our ships were stranded.

Then they refresh themselves, and in the morning obliging nymphs bring goats to them that they might eat. They look over into the land of the Cyclops, and see their dwellings smoking, and hear their voices and the bleating of their flocks. The next night past, Odysseus is stung by the traveller's gad-fly, curiosity. He must go with his ship and his companions, leaving the rest in the island, and see these Cyclops. They set off—a black Monday for some of them! The first thing that greets their sight in the new land is a cave, high, and embowered with laurel: surrounded by sheep and goats lying about. All this was very pretty; but there lay also a man sleeping there, and what a man! if that could be called so, which was not like (says Odysseus) common men who eat bread and butter, but more resembled a shaggy top of some hill seen above others from afar.

Doubtless Odysseus had heard and sung many a song on the power of wine.

'Punch cures the gout, the colic, and the phthysick,'

is not a modern strain alone. Bethinking himself of this and

the like, he takes from his ship skins of glorious wine, which a prince and priest had given him of old in gratitude for his deliverance by his hand. And such wine it is—one pint to twenty pints of water was the orthodox proportion—and then it was better than most folk's best. But the traveller must now speak for himself:

Ere long we reached the cave, but its strange inmate
Found not within: he to the fields had wandered
To tend his sheep. Under the mouth we entered
And all surveyed. Hampers of mighty cheeses
We saw, and lambs and kids in pinfolds crowded;
Each by their ages from the others severed;
The pails were full of whey; dishes and skimmers
Held the white curd. Then spoke my twelve companions,
'Take of the cheeses, and from out the pinfolds
'Drive lambs and kids sufficient, and permit us
'To seek our vessel, and re-cross the water.'
But I obeyed not; for my spirit prompted
To wait and see our host:—perchance some present
His hand might proffer, worthy of my voyage.
Alas! no pleasant boon he brought my comrades!
We lit a fire, and taking of the cheeses
We ate, and waited till our host should enter.
At length he came, bearing a load of faggots
To cook his evening meal. Outside the cavern
He threw them crashing down; we fled with terror
Into the far depths of the rocky dwelling.
Then his fat flocks he drove within for milking;
Leaving the males without, both rams and he-goats.
Next a huge mass of rock against the doorway
He placed: not two and twenty teams could stir it;
So vast a stone his cavern entrance guarded.
Then sitting down, his ewes and bleating she-goats
He milked in order, and gave each her young one.
Thence, curdling half the snowy milk, he stowed it
In wicker baskets; half in pails reserving
For his own drink, against the hour of supper.
When this was done, a blazing fire he lighted,
And by the gleam perceived, and thus bespoke us:

'Strangers, what are ye? whence your course, and whither,
'Over the salt-sea foam? Sail ye on matters
'Of import, or unbound, as robbers, wander,
'Risking your life, and bent on wrong and mischief?'
Thus spoke he; all our hearts within were broken
With fear of his deep voice, and savage bearing:
But I took spirit, and the monster answered:
'Greeks are we, from the sack of Troy returning,
'The sport of every wind, across the ocean.
'Far from our way we wander, by the pleasure
'Of him who rules above. King Agamemnon
'Led us, whose glory among men is greatest:
'So great a city hath his power subverted.
'Suppliant we clasp thy knees, and beg thy favour
'In gifts, and treatment as befitteth strangers.
'Though strong, revere the gods who guard the suppliant;—
'Zeus* is himself the wandering stranger's guardian,
'And swift avenger of a guest's dishonour.'
I spoke; and he with ruthless anger answered:
'Thou art a fool, or come from far, O stranger,
'Who urgest me the gods to fear, or reverence.
'We Cyclops care not for the Zeus ye worship,
'Nor all his tribe of gods; we are far stronger.
'Nor would I spare thee, to avoid his anger,
'Nor thy companions, if my temper prompted.
'But come, inform me where thy ship is stranded;
'On the far shore, or near, that I may know it.'
Thus spoke he, sounding me; but I, too skilful
To be thus caught, with crafty words responded;
'The wrathful sea-god broke my ill starred vessel
'Against the rocks, below the furthest headland
'Of this your shore, whither the wind from ocean
'Bore it,—and we escaped from death, and left it.'
The churl said nothing, but his arms threw forward
On my companions; two he clasped, and lifting,
Dashed down against the earth; their brains far scattered
Sprinkled the ground. Then limb from limb he tore them,
And made his meal. A lion in the mountains
Could eat no more; of bones, and flesh, and garbage,
Nothing was left. Weeping, our hands we lifted

* The father of gods and men, better known by his Latin appellation, Jupiter.

And prayed to Heaven; despair and trembling seized us.
Now when our host had filled his mighty stomach,
With flesh of man, and drank sweet milk sufficient.
He laid him down to sleep along the cavern
Amidst his flocks. Then with my heart I counselled,
Whether to draw my sword, and pass it gently
Between his ribs, where his large heart was beating;—
But I bethought me we should surely perish,
For none could roll the huge rock from the doorway.
Therefore we wept again and staid for morning.
When morning came, again his fire he lighted,
And milked his flocks, and put them to their young ones.
When this was done, again he seized two wretches
Of my poor comrades, tore them, and devoured them.
Thus having made his breakfast, from the cavern
He drove his flocks, with ease the rock removing,
And then replacing, as one shuts a quiver.
Great were his shouts and whistling, as he drove them
Off to the mountains; leaving me deep scheming
Mischief, and praying to my patron goddess,*
To give me vengeance on him. Much considering,
I thought this way the best:—beside the sheepfold
Lay a huge club of olive, which the Cyclop
Had left to dry: we, when we saw it, likened
Its size to some ship's mast, which twenty rowers
Would urge along the deep. Of this six feet I severed,
And gave it my companions to be sharpened.
They made it smooth; I pointed it, and turned it
In the hot fire, till it was scorched and hardened.
When done, I hid it in the heaps of ordure
Which covered the cave-floor. Then my companions
Drew lots, whose it should be, with me to venture,
To lift the stake, and in his eye † to churn it,
When he should be asleep. Four men were chosen,
The fittest and the best, and I, to head them.
The Cyclop and his flocks returned at evening:
And,—whether in his mind arose some fancy,
Or some god ordered things,—he shut within doors
All, and left none without.‡ His door he guarded

* Athena, goddess of wisdom.

† He had but *one*, in the centre of his forehead.

‡ This, in the sequel, favoured the escape of Odysseus, who tied himself and companions each under a ram.

With the great stone; his ewes and bleating she-goats
He milked in order, and gave each her young one.
When this was done, again he seized two wretches
Of my poor comrades, tore them, and devoured them.
When he had dined, I came and stood beside him,
Holding a cup of dark wine, and addrest him:
'Here, my brave Cyclop, drink some wine; thou'st eaten
'Hearty of *man*; come wash it down; I'll shew thee
'What sort of drink our good old vessel furnished.
'I brought it for thee, if my fortune pitying,
'Thou wouldst have sent me home; but now thou ragest
'Beyond all bearing. Thou great knave, what traveller
'Will come to see thee after this thy madness?'
I spoke; he snatched and drank it up:—'twas wonder
To see how he was tickled with the liquor;
'Give me some more,' he shouted out, 'and tell me
'Thy name, that I may give thee gifts, and bless thee.'
Again I gave him the same cup of liquor;
And yet once more he drained it in his folly.
And when the wine around his brain came circling,
I spoke to him, and with soft words addrest him:
'Cyclop, thou askest me my name:—I'll tell thee;
'And thou shalt give me gifts, as thou hast promised.
'NOBODY is my name: father, and mother,
'And all my friends, NOBODY always call me.'
I ceased, and with fierce words the savage answered:
'NOBODY shall be kept till last, and eaten
'After his comrades; there's the boon I promised.'
He said, and staggering fell; and lay, reclining
His huge neck backwards; and deep sleep came on him.*
* * * * * *
Then I pushed in the stake beneath the ashes,
Till it grew hot; and all my men encouraged,
That none might shrink through fear: then when my bludgeon
Though green, was just upon the point of catching,
And shone with ruddy heat, I brought it near him;
My men stood round; Heaven strengthened all their spirits.
The stake they lifted up, the sharp end thrusting
Into his eye: I stood above, and churned it.
As when a man a thick shiptimber boreth,
With a great auger, which men turn, by passing

* Here the man mountain becometh grievously sick.

A thong beneath, and this and that way pulling,
So that the tool runs firmly in the centre;
So in his eye we turned the stake: and round it
Flowed the hot blood; singed were the lids and eyebrows,
And in the flame the burning tendons crackled.
As when a smith, forging an axe or hatchet,
Dips it all hot and hissing in cold water,
(For thence the temper and the strength of iron:)
So hissed his eye around the red-hot bludgeon.
Cruelly did he roar: the cave resounded.
Trembling we rushed away; with red blood flowing
He tore the stake out, casting it far from him;
And shouted for his brethren who dwelt round him
In more such caves throughout the windy mountains.
They heard his cry, and came from all directions;
And standing round the cave, enquired what ailed him;
'Why shout thus, Polyphemus, in the midnight,
'Breaking our rest? hath any robbed thy sheepfold?
'Or art thou being murdered? Speak, and tell us."
Out from the cave the maddened Cyclop answered,
'NOBODY's murdering me, my friends and brothers.'
They answered angry; 'If thou'rt hurt by no one,
'And art alone, some stroke has fallen on thee
'Sent by high Heaven, and we cannot resist it.
'Pray to thy father, the earth shaking sea-god.'
They said, and went; my glad heart laughed within me,
To think my name and craft had thus deceived them.

Thus far may serve for a specimen of a Homeric adventure. After so long a translation, the story must hurry onward faster than we could wish.

Having effected his escape from the Cyclop, not without abundance of the craft for which he was celebrated, Odysseus reaches the land of Æolus, the lord of the winds, an exceeding good fellow, who receives him and treats him for a month in all manner of abundance. When he departs, Æolus gives him a bag in which are sewn up all the adverse winds; and blows after him a soft west-wind alone. Thus they go on nine days and nights, and arrive in sight of their country. There it is—the dear old island—there goes the blue smoke curling up from many a fire-side—and who sit round those

Book X.

fires? There are the well known shapes of the hills—infancy, youth, home, wife and child rush over the mind of Odysseus —but alas! something more powerful comes down upon his eyelids. Nine days and nights has he been holding the sheet, making every tack and directing every turn of the helm, and he is thoroughly tired out. Down he sinks and asleep he falls. 'I wonder what's in that bag that he brought from old Æolus,' says a sailor. 'Gold, no doubt,' says another. 'Why should the captain come home rich, and we empty?' asks a third. 'Let us open it and see for ourselves,' proposes the first speaker. Easier done, than undone; no sooner is the string loosened than all the winds rush out; a mighty storm arises; the ship goes any where but to Ithaca: Odysseus wakes in misery, and meditates cutting short the affair by drowning himself at once. However, he endures: covers his face, and resigns himself to fate. The latter so wills it that they are carried back to the land of Æolus. They beseech him for another wind-bag, but in vain. They get nothing but harsh language, and are told that they must be hated by the gods, or all this would not have happened. So they sail onward, and in six days more come to a land where

> 'The paths of night and day are near together
> So that the labourer, if he do not slumber,
> May double wages earn.'*

This country is also peopled by monstrous cannibals called Læstrygons. These gentlemen first eat a herald who is sent to them from the fleet: then finding the Greek ships within their harbour (their wary chief had moored his outside) they smash the vessels with stones, and spear the crews like eels. Meanwhile Odysseus and his crew have cut their cables, and are off. They come to the island Ææa, the abode of the enchantress Circè. The sailors being sent to explore are entrapped (all but one) and partake of her poisoned viands. They lose their human form and grovel as swine. Odysseus,

* This, and the description afterwards of a land of perpetual darkness, seems to imply that Homer had some knowledge by report, of countries very far north.

learning the news, seeks the enchantress, being fortified with an antidote by the god Hermes.* When she tries her arts on him, he draws his sword and makes her swear the oath most sacred among the gods, (for she was a goddess) that she would release his comrades, and counsel no further mischief for him. This done, he longs for home. She wishes to detain him as her husband, and weaves various excuses. Among other things she informs him that it is necessary, before he goes home, that he should go to the mouth of hell, and consult the shades.

Book XI. Now follows a book, full of wildness, mystery, and obscurity. Listen to the directions given him for his ghostly journey:

Take not a pilot for thy ship, Odysseus;
Set up thy mast, and stretch thy white sails o'er it,
And sit content; the steady northern breezes
Shall bear thee to the place. When through the Ocean
Thou shalt have past, the groves of the dark goddess†
Shall come in view; poplars, and barren willows:
There land thy ship beside the eddying Ocean,‡
And seek the dark house of the ghostly monarch.
Here thou shalt find the four infernal rivers;
And where two torrents pour their streams together,
Beneath a rock, a deep trench thou must sink thee,
And pour libations to the empty goblins,
First with sweet mead, with wine, and last with water.
* * * * *
When thou hast prayed to all the tribes of spirits,
Take a young ram, and a black ewe, and slay them
Pointing them to the north: thyself turn backward
And look upon the river. Then shall gather
Many light shades of heroes long departed.
* * * *
Then draw thy sword, and suffer not the Shadows

* Mercury.

† Persephone, the goddess of the dead.

‡ The ancients supposed that Ocean was a mighty river surrounding man's world. Beyond it all was dreary and supernatural.

To taste the blood, ere he of Thebes, Tiresias,*
Shall be enquired of; he will tell thee all things,
Of thy return, thy journey, and its limits.

On this very pleasant errand then he sets out. In his way he passes the Cimmerians, a people dwelling in darkness, to whom the sun never rises. He arrives at the place, and all is duly performed.

The dark blood filled the trench, and they collected,
The Shadows of the dead from the dark regions,
Virgins, and youths, and much-enduring elders,
And tender girls, cut off when hope was springing:
And many wounded by the spear, with weapons
Reeking in gore, the Shades of slaughtered warriors.
All these around the trench in crowds came flitting,
Shrieking discordant: horror fell upon me.

Then fearful things happen. The prophet comes and foretels perils and dangers, but safe arrival home at last. Many ghosts of Odysseus's acquaintance come, and drink the dark blood, converse awhile, and disappear into the dark regions. There comes his mother whom he had left alive when he went to Troy; there come many illustrious women, wives and daughters of heroes; there come the chiefs who fought at Troy, Agamemnon, Ajax, and Achilles; Odysseus also sees the wonders of the place; Minos holding mock trials over the ghosts; Orion hunting the shades of wild beasts; Tityus torn by the vultures, but not wasting; Tantalus athirst in the midst of water, and hungry though surrounded by fruits; Sisyphus rolling his huge round stone up the hill, till it slips from him and bounds into the plain; and others—but now they crowd fast, and he becomes terrified more and more;—what if the Gorgon should appear to him, and turn him and his comrades to stone? The thought is enough; he and his men make a clear run for it, leap into their ship, recross the

* Tiresias was a Theban prophet, who was endued with the power of discernment and foresight after death also. The usual idea of the soul after death was, that it was a mere shadow of the human soul, requiring some animal nutriment before it could discern or judge of things. Hence all these ghosts come and taste the blood, before they know Odysseus, and converse with him.

ocean river, then the salt sea, and come to the island Ææa, the dwelling of the Dawn, and the rising place of the sun.

Book XII. Here they find Circe, who loads them with good things, and gives them injunctions for their journey, warning them against the song of the Seirens, the danger of Scylla and Charybdis, and the temptation when on the isle of Sicily, to injure the flocks and herds of the sun god, which fed on that land. The Seirens' song is resisted—Scylla and Charybdis are past—(glorious are the descriptions, but our space is brief)—the last danger, however, is the worst—they land on Sicily contrary to the advice of Odysseus,—while there they are overtaken by famine, a storm having long detained them, and are at length compelled to kill and eat of the flocks of the sun god, which were feeding round them. They take advantage of Odysseus being asleep—the deed is done—he wakes and smells their feast, and shudders for them—six days they revel on the forbidden food, and laugh at the foreboder of evil—on the seventh vengeance comes. They set sail—and when land is out of sight, such a storm arises, of wind, thunder, hail, and every thing dreadful, as 'the oldest inhabitant' of the ship had never seen before—the crew by various means are all killed, and turned to sea-birds—Odysseus alone, on his creaking and dismasted craft, is borne away by the tempest, and again threading Scylla and Charybdis, at length arrives at the island of Calypso, where we found him at the beginning of the poem.

Thus then ends his narrative; and though we have only reached half way through the Odyssey, the remainder may be compressed in a small space.

Book XIII Being loaded with gifts and provided with a ship and crew by his hospitable friends the Phæacians, Odysseus sets out once more on the broad sea, and with better luck than ever before. Sweet sleep falls on him:

> Swift flew the vessel o'er the ocean billows,
> Bearing the hero, god-like in his wisdom:
> Who in his mind had borne full many sorrows,

And wars of adverse hosts, and mighty tempests ;
But now he gently slept, his toils forgotten :—
Till the bright morning star from the sea-circle
Lifted his orb, and heralded the sun-god :
Then drew the ship near to her destined island.
There is in Ithaca a sacred harbour ;
Two rocks stand forward in the sea to guard it ;
Which break the winds and catch the mighty billows
Rolling from the outer sea. Within, the vessels
May ride unanchored in the deep calm water.
And in the inmost creek, a slim-leaved olive
Embowered a cave, dark, cool, and good for refuge,
To the nymphs sacred, whom men call the Naiads.
Within are cups and goblets carved in stone-work,
Where the wild bees their gathered stores deposit.
And there were looms of stone, where wrought the Naiads
Their robes of brightest purple. Living fountains
Sprung from the cave; and double was the doorway :
One entrance northward trod by human footsteps ;
One to the southward, sacred and untrodden,
Save by immortals. Hither rowed they, knowing
The place of old ; the boat was driven upward
Full half upon the shore ; such way they gave her.
Then from the side upon the beach descending,
Odysseus from his place ashore they lifted,
And laid him on the sand, still wrapt in slumber.

He wakes, and knows not his country's land. Where is he ? what men dwell here ? are they robbers and cannibals, or lovers of strangers, and godly men ? Often has he asked the same train of questions, but never have they been so satisfactorily answered. His patron goddess meets him, reveals herself, and tells him her whole counsel. His heart is filled with joy, and he kisses his native earth.

But now a great work was to be done, and about it they consult. The suitors were to be destroyed. To this end Pallas alters the form and appearance of Odysseus, and makes him decrepit, wrinkled, and meaning-looking, and puts on him the clothes of a beggar. She then orders him to go and seek Eumæus the swineherd, and of him to learn the state of things before any measures are taken. She herself meanwhile sets off

to fetch Telemachus, who is at Sparta, as related in the beginning of the poem.

Book XIV. In the next book, the swineherd and the beggar-king become acquainted. The Ithacan piggery is on a large scale. Twelve pigstyes, each of fifty-sow power, held the breeders; the boars, for the fewness of which the poet apologizes, saying that the suitors had played sad work with them, are three hundred and sixty; four large wolf-dogs lie guarding them; three deputy-pig drivers are in the fields each with a flock; and one is gone with a boar to the suitors. Odysseus, having narrowly escaped being torn by the dogs, is hospitably treated by Eumæus. They talk much of the king's return, which the swineherd mourns over, and believes it will never be. The stranger assures him that it will take place within the year. While they talk, the absent herds return; a fat pig is slain, and they make merry. Odysseus tells them stories of the wars of Troy, and how he had seen their king. Then they sleep—Odysseus near the fire—the swineherd under a rock in the open air, to guard his charge. The king is glad at the trustiness of his servant.

Book XV. Meanwhile Telemachus, having escaped the ambush of the suitors, and directed by the goddess, lands at an unfrequented part of the island, and comes to the swineherd's house. The dogs greet him with fawning; Odysseus hears steps, and wakes Eumæus; he sees his young prince, and is well nigh beside himself with joy. The father and son meet; the long

Book XVI. lost, the long wept father; the modest and pious son. Not long is disguise kept up. During the temporary absence of the swineherd, Pallas touches Odysseus again with her magic wand, and makes him great and beautiful. Recognition, greeting, weeping for joy, are trite and oftentold things. There is a sort of hidden envy which leads men to scorn the joys of others. Let then this meeting and its tearful happiness remain in the first freshness and faultless melody of the ancient bard. Next to congratulations, their mutual plans for the destruction of the suitors form the subject of their talk.

These are in number one hundred and eighty men, good and strong; and therefore require no little circumventing. First, Odysseus is to come in the garb of a beggar, and to submit to ill treatment from them till a fit hour arrives for vengeance. Next, no one, not even the queen, is to know of his arrival. Then Telemachus is to carry away all the weapons out of the reach of the suitors, only reserving enough for his father and himself.

Now, reader, place yourself in the hall of Odysseus's palace. There sit the suitors, eating and drinking. A bard plays the harp to them, and the strain flows out at the doors, and reaches the ears of two advancing to the porch. One is a sturdy yeoman, with face accustomed to command, but *what*, you might doubt. The other is poor and ragged; but kingly. He has already suffered insult, but prudently contained his anger. They stand and debate:—the peasant advances, the other remains. A dog, lean, old, and neglected, lies by the palace gate. See—he is aware of something unusual. He lays down his ears—he snuffs—he wags his tail. The beggar's hand is at his face—it is wet with a reluctant tear. There is much love laid up in that heart—but its hour is not come. The two have entered. The yeoman sits and eats; the other stands and begs. He is abused and insulted; Antinous, the haughtiest among them, answers his request by a stool at his head. He suffers it, and prophesies ill for the donor. The house is raised at the evil deed: for they said it *was* an evil deed, to wound a needy man who came unprotected. The queen hears of it. She sends for the stranger to ask of him concerning her husband. But their meeting is not to be yet. He puts her off till evening.

But now a rival beggar, Irus, who has been accustomed to monopolize the 'beat,' appears, and a fight ensues. The professional mendicant gets worst off—for which Odysseus has thanks and gifts from the suitors, who (Homer's own words) died with laughter at the fun.

More passages follow, which we leave unnoticed, hastening to our end. Night comes; the stranger lights the maids to

their work; Telemachus gathers the weapons, as it had been agreed; and the plot thickens.

Book XIX. Insults are heaped on the stranger by the maid-servants, who are in league with the suitors. The queen reproves them, and enquires of him his birth and adventures. He invents a story, telling her how he had been to Troy with the Atreidæ, and seen Odysseus in Crete.

> Thus spoke he, false things with true semblance telling:
> She heard, and in a flood of weeping melted;
> As snow upon the tops of mountains wasteth,
> The warm wind blowing; and full streams gush from it;
> So down her beauteous cheeks fast tears were flowing,
> For her dear husband, who was there before her.
> Odysseus saw, and in his heart he loved her,
> Pitying his own dear wife; but to observers
> His eyes, like horn, or iron, wore no meaning,
> Fixed in his eyelids.

To prove his truth she requires him to describe Odysseus as she had seen him. This he does minutely, choosing for his description the very garments which Penelope had wrought; moreover he tells her the real story of her husband, up to the time of his sojourning with the Phæacians, and represents him as being still there gathering treasure and about to return shortly. For this he is honoured by the queen; set in place of dignity, and delivered over to the aged nurse, Eurycleia, to be beautified. She, suspecting (as is the nature of old women) his similarity to her lost master,—during the hospitable office discovers him by a scar, the relic of a wound received in hunting from a boar in former years. The consequences of the detection are prevented by Athena turning the attention of Penelope another way, so that she does not notice the old lady's emotion, nor her words. Odysseus puts his hand upon her mouth and binds her to secrecy. Then follows a beautiful speech from the queen;

> Soon will arrive the pleasant hour of slumber,
> To them to whom the boon of sleep is granted.
> But for my lot is endless grief apportioned;

Tears are my joy by day; amidst employments,
Mine and my servants', weep I without ceasing;
And when the night comes, wrapping all in slumber,
As in my bed I lie, thick cares and grievous
Crowd round my heart, and keep me sad and wakeful;
As the poor nightingale when spring is budding,
Sings sweetly, in the thick-leaved bushes sitting,
Pouring thick notes with many a trill and warble,
Thick notes and mournful; thus my heart distracted
Meditates anxious cares and finds no comfort.

But our chapter must be drawing to a close; though willingly would we linger round these pleasant places of poesy for many a midnight hour.

The insolence and pride of the suitors increase: heaven takes its part; dire thunders boom through the palace hall; the eyes of the feasters are dim, their brains whirl round; the cups fall from their hands; their measure of crime is filling fast. Many a thread of life on the web of the fates is near its end. The purposes of Providence are rising up upon men's minds. Handmaids at the mill speak prophecies. Weary with unrewarded toil, they snuff the approach of vengeance; the life of the injured is in the future. Book XX.

Long years of doubt have ended, and the queen has decided her course. Behold the bow of Odysseus! strong, beautiful, and precious, the memorial of a line of heroes, the gift of a friend in arms. It hangs on its nail in the secret chamber—a fair hand is reaching it down. The suitors are collected. Whoso draws this bow, shall wed the queen. Unworthy is he of Odysseus' wife, who draws not Odysseus' bow. Book XXI.

Whoso shall easiest draw that string and furthest,
With him I go, leaving this island palace,
My bridal home, my beautiful, my costly;
Oft will it rise among the dreams of memory.

Sweet words; but bitter deeds follow. Bold is the trial; the faithful servants weep for their lady. Her son comes to her rescue; if he can draw the bow, she shall not wed. But he is young—his hands are powerless—he has failed. One after

another, the suitors handle the bow—still straight is the wood, and unstrained the string.

See three men advancing—the swineherd, the neatherd, faithful among the faithless—and the third, the beggar-king. They know him, they fall at his feet, they kiss and weep over him. 'Will ye aid me?' 'We will.' 'Let the doors be shut, and give me the bow.'

The suitors are warming the wood in the fire; but none the more will it bend. 'Let us pray to the gods, and sacrifice, and they will give us strength.' No: the gods are against you.

The doors are shut. The bow is in the hand of its lord. It is stretched—let go—the effort costs him nothing. Bright and sharp is the twang of the string. Again heaven thunders; the hearts of the suitors quail.

Book XXII. Now at length the sign is given. Father and son side by side stand opposed to the herd of suitors; insolent indeed, but doomed. The beggar's garb is cast off; much work is to be done; naked and muscular, like the death-dealing god of the bow, stands the injured and avenging king. 'Now let us try another aim.'

Antinous, the most insolent of the suitors, is lifting to his mouth a golden two-handled goblet—full purple and full bright the wine mantles within. It is near his lips—*(there is a proverb)*—a strange and ungracious substitute enters the mouth prepared for the draught—he falls—death is on him. Tha crowd rises—their spirit is awakened—'Ill hast thou shot, O stranger.' The king is revealed—'Wretches, ye said I should never return—behold me here.' Which way shall they fly? There is none. They tamper; they try to negociate. 'Villains, none of your protocols! Fight, or die!'

Swords are drawn; the struggle is fierce. There are traitors within—twelve spears, twelve helmets are being brought. Odysseus waxeth faint. The traitor goes again to the chamber—they bolt him in—he may spend his time as he can. But the king is surrounded—he will fall! But a divine arm

is with him, even Pallas Athena herself, and the fight is restored. Slaughter rages: the bard and the herald are saved alone. The handmaids, partakers in the suitors' guilt, are strung up in the hall—their feet quiver, but not long. The traitor is miserably slain—the work is finished.

But who shall tell the greetings and recognition between the chaste long-suffering spouse and her husband-king? Homer, not we. Book XXIII

With the same veil of reverence will we cover the deep mystery and fading interest of the last book.—The king is at home—wife, father, and son, are around him—his enemies are destroyed—all seems finished: but fresh labours await him—he has been a man of blood. His people rebel—there is more slaughter. The gods in heaven are grieved—Athena descends and stays the deeds of death, and makes covenants of peace. A cloud is on the king—his brow darkens—the Odyssey is ended. Book XXIV.

READER—THIS IS THE GREATEST WORK OF HUMAN GENIUS.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE

FRAGMENTS OF THE LOST POETS OF GREECE.

Sir Isaac Newton, when he lived over the great gateway at Trinity, had a little dog named Diamond. One morning the philosopher was aroused from intense study by the ceasing of the chapel bell. It was winter and dark—he left his candle and his dog. He returned from chapel—but it was to rescue some pitiful fragments from the wreck of his papers. 'Oh, Diamond, Diamond, thou little knowest what mischief thou hast done!' A mild speech—but it drove the philosopher mad.

Yet the loss was not irreparable. Nature and nature's laws change not. The mind of man grapples with them and binds them, and if the fetter be broken, it may be knit again. The tools are still preserved—the workmen are able and many—it is only one fair fabric that is crushed—many may be hereafter wrought. But now to a deeper calamity in the history of our kind.

There was a saint—a patriarch of Constantinople, named Gregory Nazianzen. The saint was also a poet, such as the world then bred, in the poisoned death-chamber of the Roman Empire. He was a poet without *love*. The sky, the fields, the waters, the myriads of creation,—the wonderful heart of man—all these entered not into his poetic account. Alas for the man—for he knew not of the secret droppings on the soul of the grateful and nourishing dews of Poësy—he knew not the wonders and the joys revealed by communion with the humblest things—he knew not that the lifetime of the world

has been an education, a progress—that the bright and burning thoughts of one generation have been woven into the minds and every day lives of the next—he had never felt that every work of art is sacred—is a creation—is an aiming at and reaching after the first great Creator. Alas for the saint—for he was not aware that the mighty struggles of human intellect and genius before 'the true Light' arose were part of the counsels of Providence, given to mankind to teach, to exalt, to humble by exalting. All this he knew not—his Faith possessed his soul, but that soul was narrow;—there was no room for his Faith to spread over and hallow the beautiful and lovely creations of the Past—but it must cast them out, or it could not dwell there.

I said, He was a Poet: that is, he had read much Poetry, and made some verses. Now a great work opens on him. What if the best parts of the ancient poets could be collected, well morticed together, and made into a Christian poem? The idea is worthy of a patriarch—it shall be done.

He had *power* in abundance. Talk of your Pope—he is a shrimp to what the patriarchs of Constantinople were. Let them be brought—the hundreds, the thousands of tomes—the treasures of the world. Many are hurrying to the patriarchal palace, books in hand. He has them all—the manly Alcæus, the tender Sappho, the pure Simonides, Alcman, Bacchylides, Ibycus, and more. He has made his selection—the absurdest drama that the world has seen.* The rest he has given to the flames. 'Oh, Gregory, Gregory, thou little knowest what mischief thou hast done!'

This loss *is* irreparable. For who shall *re-create* the dream of the Poet—that subtlest and most complicated result of the unions between mind and matter? Who shall re-produce the individual soul and character, identity of accompanying circumstances, the love, the hope, the fear, which gave birth to the strains that have perished? Our own great poet has told

* Drama longè insulsissimum.—*Porson.* It is but just to add here, that the story in the text rests on authority not altogether trustworthy.

us of times when "the visible scene with its solemn imagery" enters *far into the heart;** (oh, what an expression is that,) and who shall prescribe for those times of hallowed influence? They came upon these ancient bards and are passed from us. The fair lands which fed them remain; but the spirit is gone. The bright Ægean still leaps and twinkles in the sunlight; but a different race are on its waters, and by its shores.

A few precious fragments, however, are left to us; lying scattered in quotations here and there. Sometimes a mere word, sometimes a line or two is given us; sometimes a stave or so of an old lyric song. Many of these sparkle with beauty, and can never be forgotten. Listen then, gentle reader, while we lay before you some of these hallowed remains. And remember while you read, that in this department, of all others, translation is most difficult; that the charm of these fragments is generally the exact adaptation of beautiful words to some beautiful thought; and those words arranged in metres exquisitely fitted to set them off to advantage; so that, with our essentially different and less flexible language, we labour behind our patterns, and fail of our effect. However, the best must be tried; and it is hard, if the inherent beauty of the thoughts do not bespeak some interest and admiration, even where the words are inadequate.

Sappho.

The first place among the lyrical bards of Greece whose writings are lost, is due to Sappho, of Mitylene, in the island of Lesbos. Of the life and character of this poetess, nothing is known to us. A few rumours are afloat; but having been propagated long since her time, form too weak a foundation for us to rest on. Her poetry is the theme of universal praise among the ancient critics; and the few pieces yet left amply justify the verdict. The following are the most celebrated of her longer fragments. The first is a hymn to Aphrodita, goddess of love.

Light-enthroned, eternal one, Aphrodita,
Child of Zeus, deep-counselling, I beseech thee

* Wordsworth.

Not with grief's keen agony, nor with judgments,
Conquer my spirit;

But be present, if to my prayers aforetime
Thou hast bent thy listening ear in mercy,
And hast come, the palace of heaven's bright ruler
Willingly leaving,

Yoking to thy chariot thy birds of swiftness,
Fair to see, who bear thee around the surface
Of dark earth, their plumage amid the sunshine
Restlessly quiv'ring.

Soon they came; and thou didst approach, and ask me,
Smiling with thy visage of love immortal,
Why I grieved in sorrowful supplication,
What was the burden

Of the wish, my fluttering heart that maddened.
— 'Whom art thou entrapping with soft persuasion
'In thy nets of witchery? tell me, Sappho,
'Who hath offended?

'If he now retreats, he shall soon pursue thee,
'If he now spurns presents, he soon shall give them,
'If he loves thee not, he shall quickly love thee,
'E'en tho' thou wouldst not.'—

Come to me now also, and loose my spirit
From its load of cares, and the utmost wishes
Of my soul, accomplish, and ever be thou
Present to aid me.

The metre of the above translation is that of the original, and is called Sapphic, from its authoress. It ill suits our language, and can only be made agreeable to the English ear by some peculiarly happy position of words concurring with the sentiment to be rendered. It is given as a specimen to the reader of the form which the thoughts of Sappho loved to take. The rest of the fragments shall be clothed in metre less harsh and unusual, except where the Sapphic form happens to please our ear.

The second fragment has been the most celebrated of any that have reached us. It describes the influence of excessive beauty. Poets of all ages have sung how there is that in the

presence of beauty which awes and subdues and inspires the heart of man. Drayton, in his Polyolbion, could tell how

> ——— an unletter'd man, at the desired sight
> Of some rare beauty, moved with infinite delight,
> Not out of his own spirit, but by that power divine
> Which through a sparkling eye perspicuously doth shine,
> Feels his hard temper yield, that he in passion breaks,
> And things beyond his height, transported, strangely speaks.
>
> *Song* 13.

Many have beeen the translations of this piece of powerful description; we give our own with much diffidence, after such able predecessors in the work:

> Happy as the gods is he
> Who shall sit in sight of thee,
> Ever watching thee, the while,
> Sweetly speak and softly smile.
>
> When I saw thee, ill at rest
> Leapt my heart within my breast;
> I would speak, but on my tongue
> Mute the unformed accents hung.
>
> Fire ran up my trembling skin;
> Rang my ears with throbbing din;
> Darkness o'er my eyes was cast,—
> Cold drops trickled down me fast.—
>
> Quivering seized me; ashy white
> Turned I; those who saw my plight,
> Senseless, speechless, would have said,
> 'But a little, and she's dead.'

Perhaps the student of Poetry will prefer the smaller fragments of Sappho, in which are found those deep touches of love and nature, which make them sources of intense delight to all who know them. Here is one of these; often adopted and enlarged on, but never so beautiful as in its own simplicity:

> My mother sweet, I cannot weave my web—
> My heart is thinking of the youth I love.

What a perfect picture is this, let in upon the mind by a single touch of poetic art—an island home, looking over pastures

to the sea; the matron steadily plying her task, and the pattern growing under her hands; the Grecian maiden half blinded with her tears,—these are brought instantly before us; the ties between mother and child, and those of a deeper love, which seek support from the calmer feeling of long-tried confidence—all these rise upon our minds, and we acknowledge them, in their purest created form. Here is no accident of place or circumstance to disturb our joy and its source; the scene is perfect in beauty. Take another instance of the same marvellous power:

> Full in heaven the moon was shining,
> Round the altar stood the maidens.

This is such a night scene as that translated, in our second chapter, from Homer; the island cliffs and headlands each distinct in light: the broad Ægean, bright beneath the moon, a field of burnished gold; the pure marble altar raised on the shore; round it the chorus of votive maidens; over all the boundless heaven; and, heard at intervals, the plunging of the restless waves. Yet again:

> Sweet Evening Star!
> Thou bringest all things home
> Which day had scattered far;
> Thou bringest home the flock
> And the herd thou fetchest back,
> And the child unto its mother, thou sweet Evening Star.

Who does not love the evening? the peaceful, social time, when the soul grows fast, and the irksome necessities of this world's employments cease their importunate call? There they are, the assembled family: take them in one of the cottages whose light we even now see twinkle as we write. There is the aged grandfather, laid by and made no account of during the busy selfish day,—but now he is in his place and in honour—he is next the fire—his eye sparkles as he tells his tale, or vents his own, his well known joke; and the little one on his knee twines her fingers in his long white hair. The father is come from his work; the children cling about him—the mother

prepares their meal; the sleek, well-disciplined cat sits unattackingly by the warming toast; the wearied dog is stretched, stiff as embroidery, asleep on the warm stones:

Sweet Evening Star!
Thou bringest all things home
Which day had scattered far;
And therefore men's hearts bless thee, thou sweet Evening Star!

Here is another night scene:

All the stars surrounding the moon's high pathway,
Back from sight their glittering faces cover,
Whensoe'er, full-circled, she lights the earth with
Silvery brightness.

Here is a day-dream in the shade of an orchard:

Cool fresh waters all the noon their merry tinkling keep
Through the laden apple-boughs that to their runnels weep:
From the whispering of the leaves comes down the power of sleep.

Here a fragment of a marriage song:

They held full beakers in their hand,
They poured libations on the strand,
And blessed the happy bridegroom.

We have one fragment, recording the poetic wrath of its authoress against some common-place person of her acquaintance. 'It has the appearance,' says a former translator of these fragments, 'of a burst of indignation at some home-spun, mighty 'good sort of woman, who had neither a soul susceptible of 'poetry herself, nor the sense to admire, nor the candour to 'allow of it in others.' * How often have we met with such! But let Sappho speak:—

Thou shalt lie in the grave: never of thee mention or memory
Men shall hold in the long ages to come. Thou hast inherited
No sweet roses of song; down in the dark house of forgetfulness
Thou shalt go with the dim ghosts of the dead, flitting and vanishing.

Here is yet another night-scene, wild and beautiful:

The Moon and Pleiades are set,
It is the midnight deep;

* Bland's Collections from the Greek Anthology.

I watch the silent season flit,
As all alone I sleep.

One gem more, and we pass to another bard:

I have a child, a lovely child,
And she is like a golden flower;
I would not be of her beguiled,
If Lydia's wealth should be my dower.

But we must say a few words of farewell to Sappho. Her poetry is full of force and spirit. The intense beauty of her lines seems (so to speak) to be burnt into them, and wears the stamp of fire. How great a matter of regret is it, that these few chance selections should be all which we have left. If such beauties could be saved by grammarians and writers on metres, merely choosing lines by way of example for their rules (for such, with few exceptions, has been the history of their preservation) what a rich feast of poetic delight might we not expect from the whole, or even from the notes of an admirer. Time has amply, however, fulfilled the prophecy of the poetess herself,

Long, long ages hence,
They shall not my name forget,
Though the world be old,
And the heart be cold,
They shall talk of Sappho yet.

Next in the list is a countryman of Sappho's—Alcæus. His poetic merit is of a high order, though not equalling that of his illustrious contemporary. He is known as the sworn foe of tyranny, which at that time was spreading rapidly over the cities and islands of Greece. Here is part of a song of triumph at the death of a tyrant of Mitylene: Alcæus.

Now let us drink, and with the sound
Of merry footsteps, round and round
Let the merry dance be led,
For Myrsilus is dead, is dead.

Here is a noble fragment, often imitated by ancients and moderns:

Not stones nor timbers, nor the workman's craft,
Can make your cities; but where MEN are found
Able to stand by these and keep them safe,
There are your ramparts, there your cities built.

The following is a bold defiance to winter raging without:

The air-god raineth; through the sky
Comes down the tempest mightily;
The streams are thick with solid ice;
* * * * *
Keep down the winter;—pile up more
Upon the fire, and largely pour
The honey-mellowed wine;
And round our temples let the soft wool twine.

This poet was a warrior; and although on one occasion report says that he ignobly dropped his shield and fled, he seems, by his own account, to have shared pretty largely in spoils taken from the enemy.

With armour gleams my stately hall:
The god of war hath furnished all
With glittering helmets, from whose crown
White horse-hair plumes are nodding down;
Fit head-pieces for men of mail;
And, each upon its hidden nail,
Well polished greaves are hanging there,
And corslets of new linen fair;
And hollow shields whose shape is marred
With many a dint of spear and sword;
Chalcidian blades are hung beside,
And belts, and tunics. With just pride
Memory cons over these her stores;
Each has its tale to tell
Of battle prospered well,
Since first the trade of war was ours.

We next meet with what is supposed to be a political description of state evils; at least so the imitation by Horace has led us to conclude:

The waves come onward thick and fast:
We, midst the tempest and the blast,

In our dark vessel scud along;
Already is the gale too strong
For our strained ropes; in vain we toil,
The widening leaks our labour foil;
Our shivered sail through many a rent
Gives the fierce hurricane a vent;
Our anchors fail, and as we go,
Danger is round us, death below,
In every billow toil and woe.

In another fragment he describes the heat and thirst of an Eastern summer.

Moisten your throats with wine; the raging star
Is risen upon the earth; the summer burns;
All is athirst with heat. Beneath his wings
The shrill cicada pours his music forth,
Perched on the boughs; and the rank thistles bloom.

In another he pays a beautiful compliment to Sappho, (there is an ancient tale of tender passages between them, but like all other fair tales of hoar antiquity, modern chronologers have attempted to disprove it;)

Dark tressèd, chaste, and sweetly-smiling Sappho.

Simonides is the next name on our list; and it is a great name. It was borne by three at least—the first, author of a long and very dull poem on the characters of women—the third, writer of many epigrams and epitaphs—but the second, by far the greatest of the three, famed for purity and pathos, and whose lyrical poems were perhaps the most precious of any which have been lost to us. Wordsworth writes respecting him, Simonides.

O ye who patiently explore
The wreck of Herculanean lore,
What rapture, could ye seize
Some Theban fragment, or unroll
One precious, tender hearted scroll
Of pure Simonides.

This poet was also a native of the "isles of Greece" of im-

mortal memory, which thickly stud the Ægean sea. Ceos had the glory of producing Simonides. His life is little known; but it was spent among those great and successful struggles for liberty on the part of Greece which mark, as with a bright track, the beginning of the fifth century before our era. The despot of Asia was bent upon enslaving the land which had despised his messages and his power. His myriads covered the earth and seas. The tale of his defeat is well known; the name of Xerxes has become a scoff and a by-word; and Thermopylæ, Salamis, Platæa, with the earlier but not less glorious Marathon, are words which bring with them high and holy remembrances—they have become the watchwords of freedom throughout the world. A poet amidst such scenes, and such a poet, must have lived, sung, and died, in glory. 'The lyre and sword' might have been the title of his poems, as it has been in later times of those of Theodor Körner. The very first fragment which we shall translate, is the praise of the Spartan heroes who fell at Thermopylæ. It is preserved by the historian Diodorus Siculus, who calls it an 'encomium worthy of their valour:'

Those in Thermopylæ who died,
They had a death of joy and pride;
Happy, thrice happy, is their fate;
Their tomb, an altar consecrate;
Before our mourning be our praise,
Before the wail the triumph raise;
Such high desert, and such a tomb,
Not rust, nor years, shall e'er consume.
There rests within that hallowed ground
The triumph-song of nations round;
Leonidas, the Spartan king,
Shall to our strain his witness bring;
Who left the fame of valour high,
And glory which shall never die.

He also wrote the simple but inimitable epitaph, which was inscribed over them:

Stranger, go tell the Spartans, that we rest
Here in the tomb, obeying their behest.

The following is a combination of four small fragments of *threnes* or funeral songs:

Being a man, pronounce not thou
What may betide;
Nor, looking on another, dare to guess
How long he may abide:
For not so quickly changes the small fly,
The creature of a day,
As one fell whirlpool bears into its depths
Wealth, virtue, all away.
We have long years for death;
But few and evil days of mortal breath;
Evil and few: but when we die,
All the long lifetime of the world in the cold grave we lie.

Melancholy indeed is this, as are all the strains of ancient times that touch upon the unknown state beyond the grave. What has not poetry gained by the Christian Revelation? And yet how sweetly sad are these dirges to us—how dear to our hearts are these drops bled from the world's deep wound before the healer came!

Our next fragment of Simonides is the most strikingly beautiful of all in the Grecian lore.

Danae was the daughter of Acrisius, king of Argos, in Peloponnesus, in fabulous times. Zeus, the father of gods and men, loved her, and she bore him a son named Perseus. Her father had heard an oracle that he should be killed by his grandson. This grandson then must perish. The daughter and her babe are enclosed in a chest, and thrown into the sea—

When the winds howled round their ark,
When the fierce waves tossed their bark,
Faint she quivered with alarm,
Tears fast dropping, and her arm
Lovingly about her child
Wound she;—'Baby meek and mild,
'Woe is me—but thou in bloom
'Of sweet slumber, in this tomb
'Dark and dismal, breathest on,
'Though the cheerful day is gone,
'Though escape remaineth none;

'Nothing, baby, dost thou care,
'Though above thy long brown hair
'Ride the weltering waves along,
'Though the wind is loud and strong;
'Wrapt in purple mantle wave,
'A fair face, unwitting harm,
'If the wind and waves should be
'Cause of dread, my child, to thee,
'If thou wouldst but listen here,
'I would whisper in thine ear,
'Hush, my baby, sweetly sleep,
'Hush thou raging, plunging deep;
'Hush, O hush, the woes I weep.
'Let the better day be nigh
'In thy counsels, Father high;
'Thou who dost all issues hold,
'If the prayer be not too bold,
'Grant me, ere his life be done,
'Just revenge by this my son.'

The tenderness and beauty of this celebrated fragment are, we fear, ill preserved in a translation. The reader who can recur to the original, can alone enter fully into them.

Alcman.

Concerning our next lyrical poet, Alcman, it is even doubtful from what part of Greece he sprung. It would seem from the character of the fragments left us, that he also belonged to the islands of the Ægean, or the Asiatic colonies of Greece. Two small relics are of exceeding beauty. The first is a night scene, sacred and still:

The crags are sleeping, and the mountain valleys,
The slopes and rocky places are at rest,
The creeping tribes whom dark earth nourisheth,
Beasts in their lair. and insects in their nest;
In their black caves the monsters of the deep
Are still; the feathered race are all asleep.

The other looks like the speech of an aged bard, lamenting the decline of his strength:

No more, sweet girls, whose honey'd voice is heard
In sacred song,

Can my limbs bear me; would I were some bird
To flit along
In glistening plumage drest,
The halcyon tribes among,
Upon the ocean's foamy breast,
By no grief nor fear possest,
Ever on my sunny wing,
Light of heart, and gay of plume, a blessed bird of spring.

Our next poet, Stesichorus, is a Sicilian, contemporary with Sappho and Alcæus. We present but one fragment to our readers, which besides being very beautiful, is curious in shewing the fabulous interpretation of the return of the sun each day to the east, at a time when earth was supposed to be a level plain. The god of light is regarded as a labourer, who having performed his day's work, returns to his home in the evening. The piece is probably taken from some poem on the labours of Hercules. Stesichorus.

Now from his airy height the sun
Into his golden boat went down,
That, passing o'er the ocean foam,
He might arrive at his dark home
Down in the depths, where dwell apart
The youthful consort of his heart,
His mother, and his children dear;
Meanwhile the traveller drew near
And entered the thick laurel grove,
Great Hercules, the son of Jove.

One fragment shall also be given from Bacchylides, nephew of Simonides of Ceos:— Bacchylides.

Not by men self-chosen are
Prosperous times, or strength in war,
Or civil faction's snare:
Fate stoops down her errant cloud
Big with blessing's golden load,
Fickly, here and there.

From the many fragments, chiefly moral and sententious, we select one also from Archilochus, a native of Paros, also an Ægean island. This little piece was written on occasion of Archilochus,

the poet, whose fortune had been wrecked in civil commotion, migrating to Thasus, a neighbouring island.

There it stands, our exile-home
Raised above the barren foam,
Like the backbone of an ass,
Shaggy with wild wood and grass.
'Tis not such a happy place,
No such land of love and grace,
As the island whence we come,
As the streams that bless'd our home.

Anacreon.

Who has not heard of Anacreon? For with him we shall conclude our chapter of fragments. Glory to the Ionian colonies—again we find our poet sprung from them: Teos gave him birth. Great was his fame as a writer of odes and elegies. None of the latter have reached us. A considerable number of odes are extant, bearing his name; but the critical reader is compelled to acknowledge that many of them will not bear examination, and were evidently written many centuries after the age of the true Anacreon. They have always been popular; and have given rise to a kind of poem called Anacreontic, of a character lively and graceful, and an easy flowing metre, and adapted for conviviality. Of these odes, doubtful though they be, we shall give one or two as specimens to our readers: we have chosen those that follow, not as being the most celebrated, but as not being translated among the well known Anacreontics of Cowley. The metre is that of the original.

1. TO SPRING.

See how, the Spring appearing,
The graces scatter roses;
See how the waves of ocean
To perfect calm are softened.
See how the sea-bird floateth—
See how the cranes are parting—
Full-faced the sun is shining,
Now cleave the clouds asunder,
And dapple earth with shadows;

Now fields and flocks look fairest.
Now bursts the earth with plenty;
Now buds the fruitful olive.

II. LOVE AND THE BEE.

Young love once in the roses
A bee asleep among them
Espied not, and it stung him.
The sting was on his finger,
And loudly did he bellow.

Part running and part flying,
He sought the fair Cythera.
'O mother, I have perished,'
He cried, 'and nought can save me;
'A little winged serpent
'Hath stung me in the finger—
'A bee, the rustics call it."
She answered, 'If the stinging
'Of this small insect pain thee,
'How much, think'st thou, do they bear,
'Whom thine own darts have smitten?'

III. THE PRAISES OF THE ROSE.

While the spring is scattering garlands,
I will praise the rose of summer:
Come, my friends, and help me praise it.
'Tis a heavenly exhalation,
Filling mortals with rejoicing;
'Tis the darling of the Graces,
In the months when Love is blooming;
'Tis the God of Love's own plaything.
'Tis, besides, the theme of Poets,
'Tis the plant the muses honour:—
Sweet it is to pluck it, even
When the thorns are thick around it;
Sweet it is to take and cherish
In the hand its gathered blossoms,
Calling out its sleeping fragrance.
Sweet it is in halls and banquets,
Sweet in sacrifice and triumph.
What without the rose can please us?
Rosy-fingered is the morning,

Rosy-armed the Nymphs and Graces,
Rosy-fair is Aphrodita,
In the songs of ancient poets.
  Roses with his healing conserve
Mingles in the wise physician;
Roses strew we o'er the relics
Of the dear ones that have left us.
Time this flower alone can conquer;
For its blossoms, e'en when faded,
Part not with their first fresh odour.
  Come, my friend, and I will tell you
Whence its birth. What time the Ocean
Bore the youthful Aphrodita
Spray-besprinkled, from its surface,
And what time the warrior goddess
Sprung all armed, from the great Father,
Filling heaven with joy and wonder:
Then the earth, the first and fairest
Of her children, bore the roses.
  For the blessed heavenly conclave
Sprinkled down rare drops of nectar;
And where'er the earth received them,
Thick and sweet, on thorny branches,
Sprung the roses, flowers of pleasaunce.

Thus far for fragmentary lore. Many and beautiful are the smaller poems of Grecian bards, strewed thick over many a page of ancient common-place-books and anthologies. To these we shall devote one chapter or more, hereafter.

Meantime, reader, if these precious relics of beauty have not gladdened thee, and made thy poetic heart leap within thee, let not the blame rest with these old songsters, who are thus feebly and ill represented:—judge not the statue by the chip that remains;—blame not these Chapters on Poetry and Poets, which first have attempted to unlock the treasures of ancient song to the heart of the English people, so that the mechanic and the cottager may see the beauty of which he knew not, and rejoice:—but blame the inadequacy of the translator, and of the words which he was constrained to

employ; and remember an ancient ditty of our own, itself not less beautiful than these lays of elder times, which says,

That 'violets plucked the sweetest showers
Can ne'er make grow again.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE GRECIAN DRAMA—ÆSCHYLUS.

The Grecian character.

THE Greeks were such a people as the world has seen but once. Situated in a country diversified above every other with hill and dale, mountain and moorland, springs and caverns; under a climate rich in beautiful skies and seasons; and girt by a sea which presents the fairest effects of sun and cloud, they grew up under the constant tuition and presence of natural beauty. They added to this advantage a cast of mind the most subtle and discriminating; an astonishing quickness of perception; the perfect appreciation of modes of thought and character which were brought before them; and an exquisite ear for melody, of a kind far higher and more difficult than any of which we can form an idea. It will complete the excellence of this wonderful people, if we further remark, that the scantiness of their dress and the frequent occurrence of gymnastic contests gave them more opportunity than has ever been enjoyed in a highly-civilized land, of entering into the full beauty of the unclothed human form; that the statuary and the painter could illustrate by living examples his rules of proportion; and could delineate faithfully, situations and attitudes, which the modern artist can only witness in the constrained postures of a model, but with which they were daily familiar. From the combination of these perceptions

The Grecian Drama.

and powers, the Grecian Drama took its rise. We are told that its origin was in the vintage songs and dances, which bands of youths and maidens performed in honour of the God of the vine. In these strains they tried their skill, and the prize was the goat, the nibbler of the vine, (*tragos* in Greek, from whence they tell us tragedy, more properly trag-ody, is

derived.) The company of singers was called *chorus*; a word signifying a dance. In process of time, the songs were connected together by a story, which was told by an actor, speaking between them. And at certain points of his narrative he paused, and the chorus broke out, in songs mournful or gay, accompanied with a dance festive or solemn, as the occasion required; but as yet there was no dialogue. A *second* actor was added by Æschylus, the subject of our present chapter: and thus the first example given of what *we* should call a dramatic poem. The *chorus* was retained, though now in a subordinate situation, as far as the plot and action were concerned. This afforded the poet an opportunity of displaying his lyrical powers; and gave the audience the multiplied pleasure of dramatic action, song, music, and the dance, combined.

Distinction from the modern drama.

Our readers must however be careful not to confound these ancient representations with our modern ones, nor to suppose that interests purely human were their subjects. In them every thing was mighty and colossal. The dignity of the personages was in most cases superhuman: they were gods, or heroes, or men of ancient and mysterious fame; their actions and situations were corresponding. The plays were acted in the open air. The stature of the actors was artificially increased. They wore masks, not more to equal the size and dignity of the intended visage, than in accordance with the simplicity of the elder tragedy, which was generally the process of one great event, requiring one state of mind and feeling. The chorus stood, and in the intervals between the acts performed its dances, at the front of the stage. The scenery was simple and uniform; in some cases the same scene was retained during the whole of the play. The speeches of the actors were spoken, or rather chaunted, slowly and solemnly. All was awful and subduing. The subjects were drawn from the national history or theology; the destiny of some fated family or individual; the old legends of the wars of Troy and Thebes; and the recent defeats of Persia.

Æschylus.

Æschylus is the most sublime poet of the Grecian drama, as well as its first in point of time. He chooses the most lofty subjects and treats them in the most lofty style. His men are gods: his gods, mysterious abstractions, dim and vast. His choral songs are bold, abrupt, and grand; pregnant with high sentences respecting the destinies of mortals, and crowded with the most magnificent imagery, couched in sounding and unusual words.

The Prometheus Bound.

The first drama of Æschylus which we shall select to exemplify the foregoing assertions, is that entitled PROMETHEUS BOUND; the most ancient in its subject, as well as the most simple in arrangement, of any which have come down to us. In order to understand the plot of this remarkable play, our readers must be informed of a few particulars respecting the religious belief of the Greeks.

Argument.

The family of gods which we find in power during the ages of classic literature, had not always borne rule over the earth. There were traditions of an earlier and a better dynasty having reigned in heaven: and even beyond that, of the great parents of all, Heaven and Earth, having been the first gods. The dynasty immediately preceding Zeus (Jupiter) and his family, had been that of the children of Heaven and Earth—the Titans. Of these one of the latest born and the wisest was PROMETHEUS. His very name signifies *fore-counsel*. By his assistance, the worn-out Cronus (Saturn) and his company were dethroned, and the power delivered into the hands of Zeus, his son. The new lord of heaven was proud, stern, and wilful in his rule. The universe groaned under his oppression. The old laws and rights were forgotten. The majestic remnants of the former rule were despised and scattered: the mighty Titans, each one more than a match in strength for all these weaker deities, were quelled—Destiny aiding the revolution. Prometheus himself, the abettor of Zeus, was forgotten in pride and ingratitude. But above all the miserable race of *men* was the sufferer by this change. Under former rule, they enjoyed

the golden age. Justice and piety, truth and love, had reigned among them. But they were now deserted by these pure and holy powers. Crime had come in, and the earth had been cursed. The knowledge of evil had begun: the knowledge of good had not yet dawned upon them. In their weakness and misery they dwelt in caves and imitated the beasts. They practised no arts. They knew not the blessings nor the powers of the elements of fire; and without this, how should they exercise craft or till the ground?

The friend of this oppressed race was Prometheus. By him the sacred flame was brought down and placed on earth. By him knowledge was given, art was taught, hope and desire were lodged in the breasts of men, and all on the earth was changed. Men now no longer cursed the day that bore them. Life and love, activity and joy were seen on every side. Here the proud city glittered from afar, crowded with battlements and towers. Here the blue ocean was alive with the white sails. Here the boys and virgins crowned themselves with flowers in the dance. Here the strains of music and song floated on the wind. All on earth was changed.

But a deadly crime had been committed against the new rulers of Heaven. The vengeance of the offended Zeus fell on the benefactor of mankind. Mighty was the power, high the dignity of the offender; awful and enduring must be his punishment. Two personages, the ministers of the heavenly will, have it in commission to superintend the matter, Strength and Force. The God of fire, Hephæstus, (Vulcan) is pressed reluctantly into the service.

SCENE.—*The Scythian Mountains.—A wild chaos of gigantic rocks is seen: above them all, one towering into the skies, with its broad face southward. Thousands of feet it rises sheer, and the eagles and vultures are soaring and screaming up it. From between two crags advance four forms. Two are dim and dreary, as if they had not a being of their own, but were evoked by a mightier. The third is toil-worn but strong; of heaven-built and metallic frame; wearing*

the marks of fiery toil. In one hand he bears massy chains; in the other a solid iron mallet, and wedges and nails of the same material, and of enormous size. His face is marked with sorrow, and he gazes with pity on the fourth in company, who is led by the two before-mentioned. This latter is one of lofty bearing and godlike form. His clear brow commands the scene, and from his eye seems to look forth the soul of the world. Indignation is stamped upon his countenance. His body is vast and naked. He advances, though under compulsion, yet as one knowing his lot, and fulfilling it. He is an image of Power that has been, is not, but is yet to be.

The dialogue now begins. The persons represented in the drama are,

Strength, the servant of Zeus.
Force, the servant of Zeus.
Hephæstus, god of Fire.
Prometheus.
Chorus of Ocean Nymphs.
Ocean himself
Io, the daughter of Inachus, king of Argos, beloved by Zeus.
Hermes, the messenger of Zeus.

The first two scenes we shall present entire to our readers. The speakers in the first scene (in his earlier plays Æschylus never introduces more than two actors, and the chorus, which is not yet present) are,

Strength, the servant of Zeus.
Hephæstus, god of Fire.

STRENGTH SPEAKS.

We have arrived at Earth's extremest verge,
The Scythian waste of trackless solitude.
Thy care must be to do the high behest
Which our Sire gave thee—to these lofty crags
To bind this rebel in eternal links
Of adamantine fetters. For thy charm,
The worker of all art, sight-dazzling fire,
He stole, and gave to mortals—wherefore now
Such recompence he pays—that he may learn

Feälty to observe to Him above,
And cease from practising his love to man.

Hephæstus. Ye have done all—no more doth He require
Of you, his servants; but my heart doth fail—
I cannot bind to this strange den of storms
A god of kindred race: and yet I must—
Our Father's word 'tis hard to disobey.
Thou lofty One in council, child of her
Whose name was Justice, not my will nor thine
Concurring, with inevitable bonds
I am to nail thee to this desert rock;
Where never voice shall reach thee—never form
Of any mortal shall thine eye behold;
But thou shalt parch in the sun's burning rays,
And change thy heavenly bloom; pleased thou shalt see
The variegated night succeed the day,—
Pleased thou shalt see the sun disperse the dew;
And ever shall the weight of present ill
Distress thy spirit; for he is not yet
Who shall release thee. Such is thy reward
For loving men: and for that thou, a god,
The gods not fearing, hast imparted gifts
Sacred, and disallowed to mortal hands.
For this at yonder undelightsome rock
Thou shalt maintain erect and sleepless watch:—
Many the cries and groans of fruitless woe
Which thou shalt utter: He who rules above
Is stern of purpose, of unbending soul:
For He is ever harsh, who newly reigns.

Strength. Stay there—for wherefore dost thou weave delays,
And pity him in vain? Why not abhor
This god, whom all in Heaven so justly hate,
And who hath given to man thine heritage?

Hephæstus. The ties of love and friendship are too strong.

Strength. It is ev'n so: but dar'st thou disobey
Our Sire's behests? dost thou not fear this more?

Hephæstus. Thou'rt ever fierce, and full of rash resolve.

Strength. In this at least: for it doth nought avail
To mourn for *him*: labour not then in vain.

Hephæstus. O my hard craft, how much I hate thee now!

Strength. Blame not thy craft: of all the present ills
Thy craft hath nothing done to be the cause.

Hephæstus. Would that some other wielded these my tools.
Strength. All things we gods can do, save govern all;
None is entirely free but Zeus himself.
Hephæstus. This I know well, and have not ought against.
Strength. Wilt thou not hasten then to bind his chain,
That thy delays may not be seen above?
Hephæstus. Here are the bolts made ready for his arms.
Strength. Take him then, round his wrists with thy full strength
Weld them, and rivet well unto the rock.
Hephæstus. The work proceedeth with no idle hand.
Strength. Strike harder,—narrower yet,—give him no room;
Escape, though desperate, he can yet devise.
Hephæstus. This arm at least is fixed beyond his power.
Strength. Nail then the other safely; he shall learn,
Wise as he is, that Zeus is abler still.
Haphæstus. None (save himself) can blame this work of mine.
Strength. Now then, the sharp tooth of the iron wedge
Drive through his chest, and see thou make it firm.
Hephæstus. Alas, alas, I grieve to see thy pains!
Strength. Art thou delaying still, and o'er the foe
Uttering thy plaints? Beware *thou* mourn not next.
Hephæstus. Seest thou a sight which thou canst bear to see?
Strength. I see this rebel reap his just reward.
But now around his sides clasp thou the belts.
Hephæstus. It is my duty, urge me not again.
Strength. Yea, but I will, and goad thee to thy work.
Now bow thyself, and chain his limbs below.
Hephæstus. The work is done—the labour is not long.
Strength. Now firmly drive your nails and pierce his feet:
Heavy his wrath who overlooks thy work.
Hephæstus. Thy tongue speaks language fitted to thy form.
Strength. Be softened if thou wilt, but blame not me,
Because my hate is fit, my purpose stern.
Hephæstus. Let us begone,—the toils are around his limbs.
Strength (to Prometheus.) Here then insult—and steal the heavenly rights
For creatures of a day. Which of these pains
Can mortals ease thee from? By a false name
The gods have called thee, 'the fore-counselling One:'
Thou needest one, methinks, to counsel thee,
How thou may'st shift this burden from thyself.

SCENE II. *Prometheus alone, nailed and chained to the lofty rock above mentioned. Around is a vast prospect. Mountains, lands, and rivers lie before him, even to the far and glittering sea. Over head the sun is bare and bright. Prometheus speaks.—*

Thou divine air—ye swiftly fleeting winds,—
Fountains of rivers,—and ye ocean fields
Dimpled with countless waves—thou mother earth—
And thou, all seeing circle of the sun—
Be witness, what a god from gods endures.
See with what torments fierce
Pierced through, I shall endure
Ten thousand years of woe:
Such a relentless course
The new-established king
Against me doth pursue.
Alas, alas, one woe is present now,
And more are yet reserved. Where will the end
Of these my sorrows be?
And yet, what say I? Throughly do I know
All that will happen—nought unlooked-for comes
To my foreseeing soul. But I must bear
My fated toil—Almighty Destiny
Is on me with her rigid hand of power.
I may not grieve—I may not hold my griefs
In speechless tolerance. To mortal hands
I gave the heavenly gift—for this the yoke
Of dire necessity is on me laid:
By stealth within a staff I bore to them
The hidden fount of fire, which taught them art,
And furnished forth their lives. Therefore I pay
The penalty of sin; chained beneath heaven
Midway in air.
Hah! what could be that voice,
That sense of near approach of living thing,
Divine or mortal, or of both commixed,
That floated to me here;
Comes any to this final bound
Of the great earth to see my woe?
Behold, behold the fated One,
The foe of Him above—the god
Whom all his fellows hate

Who crowd the hall of Heaven—
The friend of human kind.
What do I hear? What fluttering draweth near,
As of some feathered flock? Air, far and near,
Is on the whisper with the rush of wings.
Each thing that comes raiseth new cause of fear.

Thus far the Poet. The approaching band is the chorus of ocean nymphs, whose still recesses in the depths have been boomed through by the loud strokes of the mallet of Hephæstus. They have come on the wings of the light winds to see and to condole. By their request he relates to them the whole history of his ancient services to the gods, and his present requital. He begs them to remain by him and watch his fortunes.

Next comes Father Ocean himself, borne on a winged courser. He tells Prometheus that he has no better friend—and in proof of the assertion (as usually is the case) proceeds to give him sage advice, when it is of no use. Many and wise are the sentiments which this respectable old gentleman utters: which, however, the sufferer receives by no means respectfully:

Prometheus. I envy thee because thou bear'st no blame,
Who didst in all help and take share with me:
But leave me now, and give thyself no care;
Thou canst not bend the tyrant—'tis no task
Of quick accomplishment: but be thou ware
Lest by the way to Him thyself get harm.
Ocean. Far better art thou to advise thy friends
Than thine own self; my friendship is in acts.
Draw me not back: for I will go—and Zeus,
'Tis mine especial boast, will grant me this
Of free good will—to loose thee from thy chains.
Prometheus. I praise thee for thy will—nought lacketh there:
But weary not thyself—for all in vain
If thou dost ought, thy pains will be bestowed.
Keep thyself out of harm, and live in peace;
'Tis not my mind, if I myself have fallen,
To draw companions with me in my fall.

*Ocean.** Not me at least—for thine own brother's woes
Are fresh within my heart, who in the West
Standeth, the pillars of the heaven and earth
On his broad shoulders bearing,—no light weight.
I also call to mind the earth-born lord
Of the Cilician caves, Typhon the fierce,
The hundred-headed monster, who withstood
The gods' united strength, from his dark jaws
Hissing forth murderous threats—by force subdued;—
From out his eyes flashed bolts of living fire,
As if to whelm heaven's kingdom by his might;
But the unsleeping thunderstroke of Zeus
Met him,—the winged lightning, breathing flames,
Which reft him of his vaunting; to his heart
The flame descended, and his giant strength
Was scorched and withered—now, a feeble corse,
Near to the narrow sea he lies, compressed
Under the roots of Ætna; on whose top
Hephæstus sits, working the heated steel;
Whence ages hence shall burst rivers of fire,
Wasting with angry jaws of lambent flame
The fruits of level Sicily. Such bile
Shall Typhon upward cast, such heated showers
Of fiery hail, though by the bolt of Zeus
His ancient might be all to ashes turned.

Prometheus. Thou art not inexperienced, nor dost want
Me as thy teacher: save thou then thyself
As thou know'st how; for I will drink this cup
Of sorrow, till the wrath of Zeus shall cease.

The dialogue continues a little longer, and then Ocean departs on his Pegasus; and the interchange of woful words goes on between Prometheus and the Chorus. After a song in which they lament his unworthy fortune, he describes to them the benefits which he had conferred on miserable mortals, in the following lines:

Prometheus. Think not that pride, or haughtiness of soul,
Locks up my lips: deep sadness gnaws my heart,

* The best editions give this speech to Ocean. It seems far more appropriate thus, and not (as in some copies) in the mouth of Prometheus.

To see myself thus set at nought and scorned.
And yet who gave to these new gods their power?
Who, but myself? But let that pass: ye know
All that I could declare. Hear ye the wounds
Of wretched mortals, which my hand hath healed:
How, when before they were as infants, I
Put wisdom in their minds, and gave them power,—
Them, who before, though seeing, saw in vain,
Though hearing, heard not: but, as in a dream,
Thro' their long life all things obscurely mixed.
No brick-built dwellings had they, warm and safe,
No work in wood: but in dark caves beneath
They dwelt, like burrowing ants. No certain sign
Had they of winter, nor of flowery spring,
Nor of fruit-bearing summer, but all works
Unknowingly they did, until I shewed
The risings and the settings of the stars.
Yet more—the chief invention of all art,
I found out *numbers*, and the signs combined
Of letters, and unfailing memory,
Mother of every muse. I was the first
To yoke the beasts, and teach them to obey
The whip and rein: and that I might relieve
Mortals from toil severe, I joined the horse
To the proud chariot, the rich man's delight.
None but myself found out sea-passing ships,
That float with linen wings athwart the world.
But, which was more than all, if any fell
Into a sickness, there was none to help,
Unguent, nor healing draught, nor diet bland;
For want of these they pined, until I shewed
The art of mingling kindly antidotes,
With which each sickness might be safely met.

* * * *

Such things I gave them: and beneath the ground
The riches that lay hidden from mankind,
Copper and iron, silver and bright gold,
Who, before me, can boast that he hath known?
In one short word of all the substance hear,—
'*Men from Prometheus every art derive.*'

Then enters a new visitant. Io, the daughter of Inachus king of Argos, was beloved by Zeus. Hera (Juno) stung with jealousy, inflicted on her the loss of her human shape, and the penalty of long and painful wanderings over the world.—In southern countries, we learn that the extensive herds are often driven almost to madness by the fear of the breese, or gadfly—that on hearing its approach they leave the fairest pastures, and rush wildly over rocks and streams. In such a shape and with such a pursuer, was the daughter of Inachus roving over the world. In her case Prometheus continues his work of benevolence to mortals. He announces to her the wanderings yet fated for her to accomplish; and strange and horrible they are. Time would fail us to relate all the barbarous races whom she is to visit in turn, before she reaches the Egyptian Delta, the term of her persecutions. In one matter is the Argive princess connected with himself. She is to bear a son by Zeus, whose twelfth descendant is to be the renowned Hercules, the looser of Prometheus. Io departs, panic-struck by her airy tormentor. Meanwhile, the spirit and boldness of the mighty prisoner increase. The Chorus have observed, that there is no way of escaping from the counsel of Zeus, when he breaks out in a strain which introduces the terrible and sublime ending of this drama;—our readers will thank us for giving the two last scenes, as we have the two first, entire.

Prometheus. Yea, Zeus himself, albeit his thoughts are high,
Shall be abased:—a marriage he prepares,
Which from the tyranny of highest heaven
Shall cast him into dust;—his father's curse,
Invoked, when from his ancient throne he fell,
Shall then be all fulfilled. No god but I
Can shew him safe escape from this ill fate.
All this I know, its very form and time:
And therefore let him sit above and trust
To his earth-shaking bolts,—let him launch forth
His shafts of lambent fire—all shall avail
As nought to guard him from his shameful fall:—

Such an antagonist even now himself
Prepares, a monster hard to be withstood;
Who shall wield fire brighter than lightning flash,
Whose voice shall drown the thunder; and the spear
Of dread Poseidon, the earth shaker, shall
This foe in shivers rend. By such a fate
When he hath fallen, shall Zeus at length be taught
'Twixt power and thrall how wide a difference lies.

Chorus. What thou dost *wish*, against thy foe thou speak'st.

Prometheus. Yea, what I wish, but what shall be fulfilled.

Chorus. Must we then think that Zeus shall be o'ercome?

Prometheus. Aye, and shall suffer fiercer pains than mine.

Chorus. How canst thou speak such words, and tremble not?

Prometheus. What should I fear, whose fate is not to die?

Chorus. But he may doom thee to some direr pangs.

Prometheus. I challenge him: this soul is armed for all.

Chorus. Those are the wisest, who avert his wrath
By due submission.

Prometheus. Ye may bow you down,
And pray, and oil the ruler's troubled soul
With flattering words; to me he's less than nought.
Let him rule *now*, and do his little will:
His reign shall not be long.
But I behold
Hither approach the lacquey-slave of Zeus,
His newest majesty's new courier;
He brings, be sure, some tidings yet unheard.

Enter HERMES.

Hermes. To thee I speak, bitterest of bitter tongues,
Sinner against the gods, who hast purloined
The heavenly fire, and given gifts to men:
The Sire commandeth thee to say, what words
Were those thou spakest, and what marriage bond
Shall cast him from his throne:—and tell me not
In thine own riddling way, but plain and clear;
Give me no double sense: thou knowest well
Such answers soften not the ire of Zeus.

Prometheus. It is a well-mouthed and sapient speech,
Such as befits the lacquey of the gods.
Ye are but young in power,—and think that ye
Dwell safe in scathless towers—have not I seen

Two despots tumble from these very thrones?
And I shall see the third, who ruleth now,
Basest and quickest fall. Can I, dost think,
Tremble and crouch before these youngster gods?
'Tis further from my thoughts than thou canst tell.
Go hie thee back the way thou camest here:
For nothing thou shalt learn which thou hast asked.

Hermes. 'Twas just by such perverse and erring words
That thou didst bring on thee thy present woe.

Prometheus. This plight, be sure, I would not change for thine,
Thy gilded slavery. Far better 'tis to serve
This naked rock, than to run post for Zeus.
Thus must I rail at him who rails at me.

Hermes. Thou seemest to take pleasure in thy plight.

Prometheus. Pleasure! such pleasure light on all my foes:
And thee I number in the list of them.

Hermes. Hast of thine evils aught to lay to *me*?

Prometheus. Yes, in one word, I hate the host of gods,
Who, when my hand hath helped them, wrong me thus.

Hermes. I see thou labourest with a dire disease.

Prometheus. Yes, the disease of hating who hate me.

Hermes. How hard would'st be to bear if thou didst reign!

Prometheus. Alas!

Hermes. Zeus knows not such a word as this.

Prometheus. But lapse of years may teach him this and more.

Hermes. Hast thou not yet learned to control thy tongue?

Prometheus. No; if I had, I should not talk with slaves.

Hermes. Thou wilt not tell, it seems, what the Sire asks.

Prometheus. Thou think'st I must oblige so kind a friend?

Hermes. Thou mockest: dost thou take me for a child?

Prometheus. Yea, for a child, and yet more simple far,
If thou dost hope aught to extort from me.
There is no torment, nor no harsh devise
Whereby he can compel me to divulge
My words, before he loose me from these bonds.
Aye, let the dazzling flame be downward hurled,
And with his white-winged snows, and direful claps
Of subterranean thunder, let him whelm
All nature in the storm, he ne'er shall force
Me to declare by whom his power must fall.

Hermes. Hast thou said aught that can amend thy lot?

Prometheus. My course is weighed and pondered long ago.

Hermes. Endure, thou rash one, to submit thy thoughts
Unto thy present ills; at length be wise.
Prometheus. Thou troublest me in vain; were I a wave,
Thou might'st as soon persuade me. Let it not
Within thy thoughts have place, that I shall bend
To feminine obsequiousness, through fear
Of Zeus, thy master: shall beseech my foe
With womanly uplifting of my hands,
To free me from these chains:—it cannot be.
Hermes. I seem to speak words many, and in vain.
His heart nor melts nor softens at my prayers:
But as a new yoked colt, champing the bit,
He plunges, and against his bridle fights.
But he is lavish in perverseness weak:
For stubbornness, when wisdom backs it not,
Hath less account than none. Wherefore hear now,
If thou refuse obedience to my words,
What storm shall come upon thee, and what height
Of dread inevitable woe:—this cliff
The mighty Father first shall rend apart
With thunder and sharp lightning, and deep hide
Thy body, in the strong embrace of rocks.
Thus ages long shalt thou fulfil: then back
Into the light return, where the swift hound
Of Zeus, the murderous eagle, tearing wide
A gash across thy side, shall visit thee,
A daily guest unbidden, and shall feed
On thy dark liver. Look not for an end
Of all this woe, till some kind god be found
Willing to seek the dismal realms below,
And take thy pains upon him. Now advise;—
My words are no vain threat, but said in sooth:
For the high tongue of Him who rules above
Utters no falsehood, but performs its words.
Look well and ponder—and persist no more
To choose thy self-will, and reject wise thoughts.
Chorus. The words of Hermes to our ears convey
The sense of timely wisdom; they advise
Thy soul to leave its pride, and learn good counsel.
Consent—'tis folly to persist in sin.
Prometheus. What he would say I knew before:
Nor is it matter of complaint

That foe should suffer ill from foe.
Let therefore now descend
The two-edged curl of fire:
Let heaven with thunder rock
And with the wild winds howl:
Let the tempest wrench the earth
From its deep foundation roots:
Let him fling the ocean waves
Boiling with their surge and spray
Round the courses of the stars:
Let him in his eddies fierce
Of the nether whirlwind, snatch
This my body, till it drop
In the blackening gulphs of hell:
All will not avail to crush me,
I can never die!

Hermes. Ye hear his frenzy-prompted words,
Mad must he be, who vaunts in woe.
But ye who hitherto have shared
With pitying heart his troubles, hence
Quickly depart, lest even ye
By the loud bellowing thunder struck
Be of your sense bereft.

Chorus. Speak better words, and counsel that
Which we may follow: this thy speech
Cannot be borne. Why orderest thou
So base an action? We will bear
With him, whatever is decreed.
Traitors we hate; no human crime
Is worthier to be shunned.

Hermes. But yet remember what I say:
And blame not fortune, if ye fall
To fierce calamity a prey,
Nor say that Zeus hath you involved
In deadly danger unforeseen,
For ye are warned: not suddenly,
Nor stealthily, have ye too fallen
Into an endless net of woe
Which your own folly spread.

An awful interval follows: as if by one calling them, the clouds gather; strange and dreadful voices thicken; the storm is begun. The voice of Prometheus is heard:—

Prometheus. Not in threat,—in very deed
Reeleth now the tottering earth:
Bellows now the thunder near;
From the rifted heaven run out
Tendrils of far glittering flame:
From the plains the dust is soaring
In the whirlwind; all the breaths
Of all tempests leap and rush
One against the other roaring:
To the sky the deep is lifted.
Such a blast with terror armed
Down upon me cometh, charged
With the anger of the gods.
O my mother, dread and vast!
Who about the earth art cast,
Who the common light dost hold,
O thou Firmament, behold
Me thine offspring, how I suffer wrongful woes untold.

(The curtain drops.)

Thus our readers are in possession of the principal part of this most wonderful play. Thus they have a specimen of the Greek Drama. But it is a specimen only of one kind. All in it is superhuman. But let it not be thought that such was always the case. Our next chapter will bring before them three plays by the same author on the story of Agamemnon's family.

Mysteriousness of the subject.

But let us conclude with a few remarks on the Prometheus Bound. Has not the reader felt ere this, that there is about it a strange air of mystery—a link of association with even high and holy things? This benefactor of human kind—the object of divine wrath—thus crucified on high—bears he not a dim resemblance to One other of whom we know? It is so—but how, we say not. We know that Æschylus was once accused of divulging the doctrines taught in the mysteries: we know that these mysteries contained many a fragment of ancient truth, pure in some degree from the overlaying of the popular superstition: may some primitive tradition have descended from the diluvian forefathers of the Grecian race—

some part of the creed of man before the flood—may not the Prometheus Bound contain a ray, however confused and distorted, of that light, by which we are taught to believe heaven hath enlightened the world?

The world must be at an end before an answer can be given.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ORESTEA OF ÆSCHYLUS.

NEVER were two series of legends more fertile in stirring incident and pregnant moral, than the tales of Troy and Thebes. From each of them the great dramatists of Greece have woven some of their most masterly plays.

Sequel of the tale of Troy.

The details of the Trojan expedition had been amply given in the Iliad of Homer. Various other poems (now lost) had continued the narrative to the dispersion of the Greeks after the taking of the city. The returns of these heroes were full of adventure and peril. Dangers on the deep, and dangers at home, awaited them. Odysseus, as we have seen, after ten years' wandering on the waters, only reached his home to do desperate battle with the suitors, and to end his days in blood. Menelaus, the person on whose behalf the expedition had been made, after being tempest-tost, and carried into another sea, from which 'the birds take a year to fly,' with difficulty reached his kingdom. One of the two who bore the name of Ajax, had fallen by his own hand in his madness; the other perished by the wrath of the goddess Athena. Achilles, godlike and swift, had been treacherously slain in the dance, before the destruction of Troy, by an arrow from the ravisher of Helen. Diomede, the thunderbolt of war, who had wounded even celestial warriors, found the wrath of the offended deities working in his home, and fled indignant to settle in distant parts. Of all, the aged Nestor seems alone to have arrived at 'the sandy Pylos' in peace, and reigned as aforetime, pondering on the days gone by.

But our present concern is with the king of men, Agamemnon; with his return, and its consequences. Æschylus founds on these occurrences three distinct plays, but forming one course of action, and called by the name of Orestéa, from Orestes, son of Agamemnon, being the most prominent person in the three taken together. The titles of these three are. Subject of the Orestéa.

1. Agamemnon, containing the death of the king.
2. Choëphori, containing the avenging of his death.
3. Eumenides, containing the pursuit and trial of the avenger.

Names of the three plays.

Through these three our limits will only allow us to pass very hastily. A few preliminaries being explained, we shall at once carry our readers to the scene of action.

The king, on his departure from Troy, had left at home his queen, Clytemnestra, of divine birth, and half sister to Helen, the cause of the war. A bard, of sacred character, was left to guard and advise the queen; and Ægisthus, a relation, was left in charge of the kingdom. But in the course of the expedition, a deep wound was inflicted on her maternal feelings. We have selected in our first chapter, as an instance of our doctrines respecting art, the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter on the altar, to procure favourable winds for the fleet. This took place at Aulis, where the allied fleet was assembled. She was decoyed from home under pretence of marriage to Achilles. The fond and joyful mother sent her away in her beauty and pride—and next heard of her as a victim to her father's ambition! The cords of her affection were now broken. Her lord had (so she reasoned) forfeited his power: her husband, his claim to her faith. The bard was dismissed into exile. The steward of the kingdom was accepted by the queen, and she became his. Meantime, the years waxed on. Ten summers had nearly elapsed since the king had departed. The guilty pair reigned in the palace, keeping, however, as yet their union private. Electra, the surviving daughter of the king, and Orestes, whom he left an infant, were pining for his return. So, in semblance, was the

I. The Agamemnon.

Prefatory Notices.

false queen. It had been agreed, before the expedition, that whenever Troy should be taken, the event should be announced to those at home by a series of beacons placed on the highlands between Europe and Asia.

But hush—the scene opens—what do we see?

TIME, MIDNIGHT.

Opening of the play.

The flat roof of the palace of Agamemnon, at Mycenæ. The stars burn brightly overhead. Beneath, the houses and streets are dimly seen, and beyond, the far hills loom heavily in the sky. On the roof sits one wrapt in a night-cloak, humming an ancient song. He pauses, and stretches him as one wearied. The stars look to him cold and cheerless. He gazes blankly on them. They seem to him to have a presence, and to witness his thoughts, which thus find utterance:

GRANT me, ye gods, release from this my toil,
This length of yearly watch, which, as a dog,
High on this roof I am ordained to keep:—
I know the company of nightly stars,
The lamping potentates, glittering in heaven,
Which bring the summer and the winter round—
I know their risings and their settings all.
I wait the appointed sign, the beacon light
Which is to bring the news of captured Troy:
For such the counsel of our reigning queen.
And oft as this my dark and dewy couch
I keep, not visited by dreams, Fear stands
And warns off Slumber, which alights not down
Upon my weary eyes: and when to song
I would betake me, or low murmured hum,
Sweet music, medicining my dearth of sleep,
I fall to grieving for this ancient house,
Not well-appointed, as in former days.
So that I need to pray for blest relief
From these my toils, when the glad light appears.

A something appears above yonder dark hill—is it a star rising? It increases—no star was ever so bright and red. It shoots up and flares wildly in the sky—the watchman starts up and gazes—

Hail! beacon-light of night, making it day
For very gladness, starting the gay dance
Throughout our Argos, for this joyful news.
Hurrah! hurrah!
Now haste I to the queen, that she may rise,
And lift throughout the house a choral song
To welcome this glad signal.—Troy is fallen!
And I myself will usher in the dance,
And bear glad tidings to my lord within;—
The stake was theirs; the lucky throw is mine.

He descends, with a few surmises about the state of the house within, and with a wish that all may be right, respecting the coming of the king. How this prepares for the dark scenes to follow, the reader will presently see.

Now follows *the* Chorus of all Greek Choruses, at least to our mind. Wild and magnificent in the extreme, it rushes on, a glorious river of melody. Much of its beauty must be lost in an English translation. We shall rather endeavour to give our readers the *poetry* of the song, than attempt a literal rendering—and must crave their indulgence while so doing:—

CHORUS.

'Tis the tenth long year,
Since the vengeance-laden pair,
The royal-throned and sceptred pair,
The brother-kings, set forth:
And from them burst the pealing shout of war! stern war!
As angry eagles soaring
In sorrow for their brood,
On the carage of their pinions
Wheel above their empty nest,
Wailing for the labour of their love gone by;
The while the blest Immortals
Bow their ear unto the cry,
And send upon the murderous man the bitter stroke of wrath;
'Twas thus that the Almighty
Sent forth the angry kings,
With the ravisher to deal:
Storing in his deep designs,

For Trojan and for Greek,
Many a struggle fierce and long,
Many a tug of battle strong,
Many a day of toil and fear,
Many a crash of brittle spear.
As it must be,
So it is:
Fate will have her final way:
Not with shrill shrieks of woe,
Not with sacrifice, nor tears,
Canst thou turn the iron purpose of the fearful three!
They went—we were left,
Age-stricken, unavenged:
As children we were left;—
For the young life of the child
Is rising in his breast,
While war and manly glory
Are far distant yet:
And distant are they too
From him, who fading downwards
Into sere and withered age,
Leans upon his staff, and wanders
Like a day-dream on the earth.

* * * * *

We will sing the fatal omens
That sped them on their way,—
For the deep persuasion
Of the songs prophetic
Hath not passed away:
'Twas an eagle urged them onward,
A dark and kingly eagle
To the king for signal sent;
And with him was another,
With snowy plumage blent:
By the palace towers appearing,
In the region to the right,
Their bloody feast they parted
On the far-seen height;
'Twas a hare whom they had snatched
From her course upon the plain,
With young, and ere the birth-hour
By their talons rent in twain:—
Sing sorrow, death and sorrow, but let victory remain.

On this the sage diviner
When he saw the brother-kings
This way and that disputing,
To the strife his wisdom brings;
'Twas thus he spoke prophetic:
'This army that ye lead
'In time shall pour its vengeance
'On the guilty city's head;
'The tower, and hall, and treasure house
'Shall all be plundered quite;—
'But may no stroke of adverse fate
'On this army first alight.
'For the heavenly nymph, the Huntress,
'Hath shewn her anger plain
'By the strange and bloody banquet
'Of her father's air-dogs twain:—
'Sing sorrow, blood and sorrow, but let victory remain.'

For she, the patroness divine
Of young and tender things,
Both glad and sad fulfilment
Of this her omen brings.
O may some God of healing power
Dissuade her, lest she raise
Ill winds, on this your armament
Imposing sad delays:
Demanding other sacrifice,
More grievous, which shall breed
Strife upon strife, till all your race
By just revenge shall bleed
So spake the prophet, mingling
His good with evil strain;
The heavenly signs interpreting;
Then raise the song again—
Sing sorrow, strife and sorrow, but let victory remain.

* * * *

The day was come: the elder king,
The captain of that host,
Bent to his adverse fortune,
On Aulis' tide-washed coast;
No breezes breathe from off the land
To fill the waiting sail,

And, cankered with the long delay,
Their ships and cables fail.
When fading was the flower of Greece,
The prophet dared to speak
A bitter, bitter remedy,
At which each heart might break;
Their staves against the grouud they struck,
Those brother-monarchs twain;
'Twas fearful to obey the word,
And grievous to refrain:
'How shall I slay my heart's delight?'
The elder captain cried;
'How shall I see the altar foot
'With her dear life-blood dyed?
'But how (for evil hems me round)
'Shall I desert my host,
'All clamorous for the virgin-blood
'To loose them from the coast?'
He spoke; his purpose stronger waxed,
Compulsion armed his heart;
And from his madness gentle love,
And heavenly truth, depart.

He steeled his soul to sacrifice
The beauty of his child,
To aid avenging warfare
For a woman weak and wild:
The arbiters of murder stern
Looked cruel and unmoved
At the tender one, her father's joy,—
At the father whom she loved:
He spoke; the altar-ministers
Approach her where she lay
All lifeless with the weight of fear,
And bear her form away;
Their hand is on her virgin lips,
Farewell she may not speak;
Lest words of adverse omen
Should from her anguish break.
And, as prepared for sacrifice,
Her veiling garments fall,
And shew her, like some statue fair,

Soft Pity smites them all.
She looks as she would speak; full oft
That happy virgin voice
In his palace chambers singing, made
Her father's heart rejoice.

What followed is not mine to tell;—
The prophet's art was proved full well.

But see, the attention of the Chorus is turned to yon corner of the stage. Who is that, entering stately, with a royal and solemn step, with a face composed as if for joy? Who, but Clytemnestra? But is she joyful? She is. Not that Troy is taken, not that her lord is returning; but that the hour of her vengeance is come. She is a woman lofty of soul and stern of purpose. She is the Lady Macbeth of the ancient drama: like, but oh, how different—the modern dame dared all *for* her husband, the ancient heroine *against* him; in the latter, a mother's wrongs were festering at her heart, and were the spur and excuse of her ambition: in the former the 'unsexing' for which she prays is more than half accomplished, and ambition needs no excuse and no spur but the joint welfare of him to whose life she is bound.

The news is made known—Troy is taken: the method and transmission of the torch-signals is detailed: she expatiates on the misery of the fallen city, and conjectures what the captors may be doing, at this moment or that. Now they are feasting after their evil. Now they are dividing their captives. Now they are demolishing by fire and sword. O let them spare the temples of the gods, and remember that they have yet a return to accomplish! Then follows another sublime choral song. It sings of divine justice—of the crime which Paris the faithless guest had committed—of the feelings of the bereaved husband—

He reigns; but deep desire
Of her, his absent one, with hidden fire
Consumes his life away;
Like a pale phantom day by day

He rules his palace halls;
The statue-peopled walls
For him have now no charm:
Each finely moulded arm,
Each sculptured breast divine,
He loathes; his aching eyeballs pine,
And love within him dies.
In sleep, before him flies
The form beloved; it will not stay,
But flits on dusky wings away.

It bewails the mourning which there will be in Greece over the lost heroes:

Not the loved familiar gait
Shall their anxious looks await;
Only the memorial urn
With the ashes, shall return.

It ends with some fearful surmises as to the divine vengeance on the causers of bloodshed—some dark hints of dreadful calamity to befall the victor-king.

People talk of the *unities* of time and place; and point to the ancient drama as the pattern of their observance. Here, at least, we have a splendid violation of the unity of time. No sooner has the Chorus finished its song, than the herald appears, the precursor of the returning host. Now, our readers might be disposed to exclaim, 'How unnatural!' Let us, however, judge of it by principles of art. You are sitting, a spectator of Æschylus's play. You have seen the torch-beacon—you know that the main interest of the play is to consist in the events which follow the king's return. You long for that return. In your imagination you annihilate the time between. You wish them back, that the play may proceed. The Poet fulfils your wish. His object being not to deceive you by a show of reality, but to create a mighty train of events evolved by mighty principles, his action proceeds. The return might be one of many days: it might be of many years—it matters not to him. The unity of time is thus subservient, not to the actual duration of things really

done, but to the requirements of that state of mind which the Poet has created in his reader. So much in defence of Æschylus.

But while we have been writing, the herald has told her tale, the queen has vaunted her joy; incidental matters have been discussed; the Chorus has sung the dirge of Troy; and the screaming of trumpets, and the flashing of arms announce the coming of the king.

Now follows the most masterly scene in ancient Tragedy. Shall we say in ancient and modern? It might suit our present mood so to say—for when we are reading Æschylus, we are soaring in regions seldom penetrated even by poets. But even with the boundless æther round him, when he rises and sings at heaven's gate, the morning lark still keeps in his sight one sweet dewy spot that lies beneath amidst the wilding flowers; he *visits* the skies, but he *dwells* there. Even so, sweet Shakspeare, with thy home of blessed thoughts and native flowers of song, do we love thee; and time shall be, if the listening ear do not fail, nor the grateful tongue tire, when we will pay thee our tribute, in the happy overflowings of a poet's heart. But how we ramble—look upon the stage once more.

They are met—stately and noble is the king of men,—but discreet withal, and god-fearing. The queen is lavish of her attentions—her professions are loud, her praises many. She boasts of her tears in absence—her faith, her purity, her love —alas! alas! alas! She counts the foot that has trampled on Troy, too illustrious to be set on the mean soil of earth. Purple must strew the way to the palace—costly tapestry must be spread to catch the victor's footsteps. The king shrinks from the triumph—it seems to him a dangerous glory. We know of one whom the hand of God struck, in the midst of pride and pomp—from such a stroke the king of men recoiled with fear. Besides, it is not like Grecian simplicity but more allied to barbarian splendour, to walk upon purple and flowers of gold. But he is persuaded: he protests, but

complies. Awfully mysterious are the speeches of the queen. There is hardly one which does not darkly allude to the deeds to come. And she sums up all, after congratulation pointed with stings, praises with taunts, the sharper and bitterer for being covered by double words, with a terrible prayer.

> Zeus, Zeus, the great accomplisher of fate,
> God of the marriage bed, hear thou my prayer;
> Be thou the worker of thine own design.

But who is this in the chariot—apparently a captive—but of wild and prophetic aspect? She is of royal birth, the daughter of Priam, Cassandra. The king has brought her from Troy. Her history is a strange one. In her youthful days she had been beloved by Apollo. She had rejected his suit. He offered her the faculty of prophecy, She appeared to yield. The gift was granted: the power was hers. She was faithless, and rejected him still. The gift once given, he could not revoke. It had been ratified by the dreadful oath which binds the gods. But he could render it useless. He appointed that Cassandra should always prophesy truth, but never be believed. Every calamity which has befallen her house and her country has she foreseen, and foretold—but none has heeded. Hither then she comes with her fatal gift. Here there is ample material for its exercise. The ancient evils of the house, (for it had been a family abundant in crime and blood) the miseries impending, the awful crimes which were to shut in the dreary fortunes of this race, her own approaching fate,—all these are wildly and enigmatically shadowed forth by the inspired maiden, and her words heard with astonishment and incredulousness by the Chorus. The following are some of her ravings:

> *Cassandra.* Prophetic truth is labouring in my breast,
> And it will forth.—See ye those children pale,
> How they beset the house, dreamy and dim,
> The ghosts of infants by their parent slain?*

* Thyestes, the son of Pelops, and uncle of Agamemnon, had been fed by his brother and enemy Atreus on the flesh of his own child. From this horrid banquet the miseries of the house of Atreus begin—and to this Cassandra alludes in the text.

Their hands are full of their own flesh—strange food,
Unholy banquet, which their father spread.
From these hath an avenging lion risen,
Even to be guardian of this house, alas,
And to devise revenge on this my lord,
(I speak as fits a slave) at his return.
Him, the great Captain, and the scourge of Troy,
His hateful consort, having soothed with words,
Shall miserably slay. The weaker hand
Shall overbear the stronger. What dire pest
May I best name her? some empoisoned snake,
Or Scylla, habitant of deadly rocks,
Spreading her traps for sailors in the strait,
A boiling hell of waters? How she greeted him,
Vile hypocrite, her voice was as of one
Who shouts as battle turns, she seemed to joy
At his unhurt return. But what if none
Give credence to these words? What then? Stern fate
Will work its work alone; and ye, full soon,
Pitying my lot, and witnessing my words,
Too true a prophet shall acknowledge me.

Chorus. Thyestes' banquet is to me well known;
I shudder at its mention, hearing thee
Whom least I thought, detailing all its woes.
But in the rest I cannot follow thee.

Cassandra. Thou shalt ere long see Agamemnon slain.

Chorus. Calm thy rash tongue, poor wretch, and talk not thus.

Cassandra. No calming power suggests the deed I speak.

Chorus. True, if it must be; but may heaven avert it.

Cassandra. While thou art praying, they are murdering.

Chorus. By what man's hand shall such a crime be wrought?

Cassandra. My prophecies thou hast not understood.

Chorus. No: I ken not the murderer's device.

Cassandra. And yet I speak the Grecian tongue too well.

Chorus. So do the oracles; but they are hard.

Cassandra. Alas! what fire is coming o'er me now?
Apollo, oh Apollo, oh me, me!
She, the fell lioness, coupled in crime
With the base wolf, in absence of her lord,
Shall slay me also; mingling in her ire
My ruin likewise in her cup of death.
Even now she whets the faulchion for her lord,

And boasts to pay my voyage here with blood.
Why do I wear these my vain ornaments,
My staff, and wreath prophetic on my neck?
Thee will I crush before my turn is come.
[*Throwing off her ornaments.*
Lie there and perish; I shall nothing lose;
Go, and endow some other to her ruin.
See, the bright God himself is doing off
My robe prophetic. Long has stern contempt
Been poured upon my art, and to my foes,
Yea, and my friends, I have but seemed to be
Some wandering quack. Now he hath led me here;
Where, for my country's altar, the sad block
Appears, and I must die by bloody stroke.
But not forgotten by the Gods above
Shall we two perish: there shall come for us
A sure avenger, who shall stain his hands
In his own mother's blood. Afar he dwells
An exile now, but he shall then return—
His father's blood shall cry, and fetch him back,
And crown the griefs of his ill-fated race.
But why do I complain—I who have seen
My own dear country, sunk in hopeless woe,
And these, its ravagers, requited thus?
Uncalled I'll go—I will invite my death.
Grant me, ye Gods, a swift and easy stroke,
That without struggle, my life's dearest blood
Forth flowing, I may close these fevered eyes.
[*She goes wildly towards the altar.*

Meantime the queen's designs have been proceeding. The king is weary with his voyage. She has taken him to the refreshing bath. She has attended him there, and spoken more false and soothing words. 'Come forth, and let the wife of thy youth clothe thee with the garments she has prepared.'

Still the prophetic maid is raving without. She cries,

There is a smell of slaughter from the house,
A thick dank vapour, as from sepulchres.

In a few more words she bewails her own fate—an awful

pause follows—the Chorus begin a song—you hold your breath—you feel your heart throbbing—hark!—hark again! 'Tis one dying, one dying within! 'Tis the voice of—the king! Never was shriek like that from one who should speak again.

The Chorus run hither and thither in confusion. The doors of the palace open—what see we? The murderess standing triumphant—the bloody knife in her hand—beneath her, the deed she has done. She rejoices—she boasts of her victory. 'Twas no mean artifice, that of her's. As he came from the bath she cast over him a fatal garment without outlet—and thus entangled, naked, and helpless, he fell by her hand. His blood is on her—she points to it, and tells them, that a flower does not more rejoice in being sprinkled with the dew of heaven. She taunts him with his crimes. The Chorus lament and remonstrate—she answers with insult and scorn. Her paramour returns—they congratulate—all things shall be firmly settled and well governed—their sun of glory is rising—some few threats of distant revenge are uttered by the Chorus,—but the avenger is an infant—he is distant—the clouds clear away—the day of tyranny and sin has begun in Mycenæ.

Is this all?

Our next chapter shall right the balance.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ORESTEAD OF ÆSCHYLUS,

Continued.

Ghost. List, list, O list;
If ever thou didst thy dear father love,—
Hamlet. O heaven!—
Ghost. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.
Hamlet. Murder?
Ghost. Murder most foul as in the best it is:
But this is most foul, strange, and unnatural

The Choëphori.

SOME voice like this, of a spirit 'dumb to others, but speaking to him,' has young Orestes heard, in the retirement of his childhood. His sister Electra, during the times of murder and tyranny, had him, yet an infant, conveyed away to the house of a family friend. Here he has grown up—his young limbs have knit into power—his heart is on fire with high thoughts.

Meantime, sin and blood have been the order of the day at Mycenæ. The cup of crime is full. The murderess, the adulteress Queen, has had a fearful vision. In the night she has risen up, she and her servants; and there was a great cry in Mycenæ. The interpreters are called. 'The dead,' say they, 'the mighty dead are angry. Their revenge is working.' Some sacrifice, some expiation must be made: some procession with offerings to the murdered one's tomb.

The arrival of Orestes.

It is the dawn of day.—From afar, two persons are approaching the town, toil-worn and dusted with travel; you see them and wonder. They are the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand, from which will burst mighty changes. There is, hard by the palace, a lofty sepulchre. There the

strangers halt. One lifts up his voice in prayer. His words have been lost in the wreck of ages. What he prays, we know not; but we can guess. But what sees he? There moves towards him a dark robed procession; the women of the palace, with libations and votive gifts. He looks—it is—it is his own sister Electra heading them, with slow and trembling step. He turns to his companions: "let us stand aside, and wait the issue." He deposits his votive locks of hair on the tomb; one to the founder of his race; one to his murdered father; and then retires. Meanwhile, their wail has burst forth—

Chorus. Forth hurried from the palace gates
I come these offerings to convey;
Wild grief hath torn my robes,
And bathed my cheeks in blood;
On agony my heart hath fed
Long dismal years of woe.

But now shrill terror, at midnight,
Hath raised her spirit-harrowing cry;
And the dream-prophets all
Declare that the great Dead
Are angered with their murderers.
And meditate revenge.

For this the godless queen hath sent
These thankless gifts to soften fate:
But at her bid, to pray
I dare not: for what words
Can expiate the stain of blood
Which mother-earth hath drunk?

Dark clouds are gathered o'er the house,
Full of stern hatred, for the death
Of its great masters. Awe,
And dread of majesty,
Of old so strong in every heart,
Are faint and feeble now.

Good fortune is their present strength,
Their god, and more; but the fell stroke
Of justice reaches all;
Some, in their noon of life,
Some in the twilight of their days;
And some in death's dark night.

Blood must be rendered up for blood:
Mischief doth hunt the sinner's path:—
There is no help in rites—
All sacrifices, poured
Upon one murderer's bloody hand
Cannot wash out the stain.

But I (for captive is my lot)
Must praise perforce whate'er they do
Who rule me by their will;
But I in secret weep,
Hiding my face: and pine away
With long and wearing grief.

The song ceases, and Electra speaks:—she is in doubt what to do:—words have been put into her mouth by her mother, to offer up at the tomb; shall she speak them, while her heart dissents? Shall she pour the libations in silence even as her father perished in silence? Shall she speak the thoughts of her heart, and pray for vengeance on the murderers?

The women counsel her well: 'Speak from thine heart. Pray for vengeance—pray for thyself—pray for Orestes—pray for every enemy of blood and tyranny.' Her prayer is uttered accordingly—and the Chorus give their assent in a concluding song.

The recognition.

But whence are these locks of votive hair? She sees them —she takes them up—she compares them with her own,—their colour, their character is similar; but they are not hers. They cannot be her mother's. Came they from *Orestes?* They are most like his; he must have sent them: then he is living and well. But where? Her mind flutters with hope and fear. Oh, for some fresh testimony; she looks down—behold the footmarks of two persons in the sand. What we wish, we believe;—they must be his, and his fellow-traveller's; they are like hers —the same shape, the same character,

* If the reader is disposed to doubt the evidence afforded by the shape of the footmarks, let him remember that when the foot was left in its natural state, as in Ancient Greece, distinctive peculiarities would be much more readily noticed and retained, than with us, who both conceal the feet from view, and destroy their natural form. The Indian to this day can track by the character of the footmark.

she begins to tremble for joy. He is surely near—the object of her anxieties, and prayers, and hopes,—the only tie which has bound her to a life now long rendered miserable. Who is this that speaks to her? It is Orestes himself. Great Poet, thou art a master over the mind of man. Before he appeared she was all confidence—now she is all doubt. The stranger must be mocking her misery. But the doubt is not long. Behold, he says, the place whence I cut the locks which are in thine hand; if that be not enough, behold this robe, thine own work,—see the embroidery of strange animals which thine own hands laboured. There is no doubt now.

Electra. Oh, precious nurseling of thy father's house,
Thou child of many tears, and patient hopes,
Whose might is our salvation—thou dear soul,
Thou comest to me, dowried with the love
Of four dear relatives—my father's claim
On thee hath lighted—thou hast taken up
My hated mother's place; and my poor sister,
Ruthlessly sacrificed—all meet in thee,
My loyal brother;—thou shalt do me right,
If only might and justice, with that third,
The great Avenger, Zeus, be on my side.

Orestes. O Zeus, vouchsafe to take our cause in hand;
Behold this lordly eagle's orphan brood,
Reft of their sire, who in the crushing folds
Of the fell serpent, died. Stern hunger now
Is on his offspring; for they have not power
To fetch them home the prey their father brought.
Shouldst thou permit *his* orphans, who amongst
All men, most honoured thee, to pine and die,
Whence wilt thou get thee honour? If thou kill
The eagle's offspring, how wilt thou transmit
Thy signals to mankind? This royal stock
Once withered to the root, all piety,
And thankful days of offering, will fail.
Grant thou our prayers; and lift from low estate
This house, o'erwhelmed with unexampled fall.

Chorus. My children, ye whom Fate hath pointed out
To save your father's house,—keep silence now;
Lest some, for talking's sake, report these things

To those in power:—whom be it mine to see
Ere long, stretched on the smoking pile in death.

Orestes. Apollo's high oracular behest
Will not betray me—for 'twas his command
Which urged me to this work: he threatened much,
Speaking of dire calamities, to light
On my young life, if I should not pursue
My father's murderers, and mete to them
The measure which they gave—I was to pine
In hopeless poverty, and in the end
Forfeit my life, worn out with various ills.
All things, he said, which bring kind help to men
In nature's weaknesses, all herbs and drugs,
Should lose for us their virtue, and should turn
To poisons; loathsome tetters should come up
And bark about our skin, and inward gnaw;
And leprous down whiten above the sores.
More vengeance of the furies, manifold,
Denounced he, from my father's blood to spring,
Plagues, dimly frowning from the dread obscure,
But bent right aiming on my victim-soul.
For vengeance from the shades, unseen, but sure,
For the dear blood which mine own race have shed,
Hunts down, as with a scourge, my cursed life,
With madness, and dream-shudders whirled and tossed.
And thus, he said, unhelped of holy rites
Cast out from sacrifice, bearing the load
Of my sire's wrath alone, all unbelov'd,
And all dishonoured, should I pine to death,
Dried up and withered by all-wasting pain.
Such threats, and such commands, enjoin the deed.
And did they not, it must no less be done:
All my desires to this one point converge,
My love of justice—my unbounded grief
For my lost father—and besides, the lack
Of wealth and power, to me his offspring due,
And indignation, that these Argive heroes,
The conquerors of Troy, should thus submit
To two vile women. For I count *him* one:
If not, his temper shall ere long be tried.

Such are the high motives which prompt Orestes in his dreadful design. After more choric songs and prayers, and after whetting their purpose by recollections of their father's unworthy murder, and its attendant circumstances, Orestes enquires the cause of the procession which he had seen on arriving at the tomb.

Chorus. I know, my child, for I was there; the queen,
Struck by a fearful dream, commanded it.
Orestes. And can ye tell the dream, of which ye speak?
Chorus. She dreamt a serpent issued from her womb.
Orestes. And to what end did such a semblance tend?
Chorus. She thought the new-born beast restlessly moved
Amidst its cradle-clothes, in want of food;
And she applied it to her teeming breast.
Orestes. Did it not wound her with its poisoned tooth?
Chorus. Yea, and with milk it drew forth clots of blood.
Orestes. Methinks 'tis no bad image of myself.
Chorus. And she woke screaming from her sleep—forthwith
The lamps throughout the house, lately extinct,
Sprung into light, where'er her cry was heard—
And she, in hope to calm her troubled soul,
Sent forth these votive offerings to the tomb.
Orestes. Hear me, O earth;—hear me, my father's tomb!—
May this dream figure forth success to me.
Thus I interpret it—the sense fits well.
If this same serpent, sprung from the same place
From whence I sprung, and cradled ev'n as I,
Sucked the same breast which fed my infant life,
And mixed its nourishment with clots of blood,
And she in terror woke—whither can point
This fable, but that she who bred the mischief,
Should die by him she bred—and I, in form
Of this same snake, am doomed to draw her blood.
Is it not so? interpret it for me.
Chorus. May it be thus!—but now advise thy friends—
Who must be active—who must stand and wait.

The plot is now concerted. Orestes, like a traveller, and accompanied by Pylades his friend, is to present himself at the palace gate, speaking in the Phocian dialect (to which

The concerting of the plot.

country Orestes had been sent) and pretending to bring the news of the death of Orestes, which they knew would be acceptable. They are to ask for the queen and Ægisthus, and the rest are to follow. The Chorus and Electra are to stand by and speak or not as occasion demands.

Now is fate busy with the doomed ones—their time is come. The strangers stand at the threshold, and ask to speak with some one having authority in the house—some woman, or better some man, for man to man can speak more fearlessly. (Is not Orestes already shrinking from the fearful interview with his mother?) The queen herself comes to them, assures them of hospitable reception, and bids them speak their errand. The news is told. Orestes, say they, is dead, and if you wish to bury him, we have the urn with his remains at home, which you can send for if you please. Electra puts on excessive grief—Clytæmnestra triumphs—the nurse, who has tended him when an infant, takes up a right nursely wailing, and goes to fetch her 'pest of a master' by the queen's orders. 'How did she say he must come, attended, or alone?' ask the crafty Chorus. 'Attended,' replies the old woman. They reverse the order—'Tell him to come alone;' and give her the reason. A solemn prayer from the Chorus follows; and Ægisthus appears, wearing outward semblance of decent grief and surprise, but doubting the truth of the message. 'Turn in then,' says the nurse, 'and speak with the gentlemen yourself.' He goes, and the moment of suspense is arrived.

The vengeance.

Chorus. O Heaven! what shall I say or whence begin,
To urge these doings onward by my prayers!
Or when shall I have done,
If my good will is measured by my words?
For now the strife of bloody steel
Is at its crisis: either now
Will sink for ever down
This lordly house; or light
And liberty will spring
Henceforward into birth,

And all the old prosperity come round.
Such combat doth the youthful prince,
Against these two maintain,
Their sole antagonist;
May victory be his!

Ægisthus. (from within) Ah me! alas!

Chorus. Listen—listen again!
How goes the matter? how hath fate determined?
For us, let it be ours to stand aside,
That we may be guiltless, be it either way;
For this one struggle shall decide the whole.

Enter a servant stamping and howling.

Woe, woe, woe, woe! My master is no more!
Woe, woe again! Ægisthus hath been slain!
Open the gates into the women's chambers—
Come, come,—we want a hand both prompt and strong—
I do not mean to help the one that's gone—
Of course not—why, ye do not move—
I speak to persons deaf, or slumbering—
Where is the queen? what doth she? for her life
Hangs on a thread—justice is near her neck.

Enter Clytæmnestra. How now? what clamour rises in the house?

Servant. Lady, the dead are slaying them that live.

Clytæmnestra. Alas! I know thy meaning through thy riddle.
Craft, which ourselves employed, hath caught ourselves.
Give me an axe—we will resist to death:
One struggle, and we conquer or we yield:
For to such evil choice affairs have come.

Orestes. (entering wildly) Thee too I seek—for *him*, enough is done.

Clytæmnestra. Alas! then hast thou died, my lord and love?

Orestes. Lovest thy lord? Then lie in the same tomb—
Thy marriage-faith will then at least be safe.

Clytæmnestra. Withold, my son—revere this naked breast—
Here thou hast lain, and breathing in sweet sleep
Drawn with thy toothless gums thine infant food.

Orestes. Pylades, shall I yield?—shall I not slay her?

Pylades. Where then are all the faithful oracles
Spoken from holy shrines? where the firm oaths?
Let all be adverse, but the gods thy friends.

Orestes. Thou hast prevailed—thou counsellest me well.
Here, *(to the queen)* follow me—I'll slay thee by his side.
For thou didst judge him worthier than my father;

Sleep then with him in death, since thou dost love him,
And hatest him who should have had thy love.

Clytæmnestra. I brought thee up,—life at thy hands I crave.

Orestes. Shalt thou, who slew'st my father, live with me?

Clytæmnestra. 'Twas stern Necessity compelled the deed.

Orestes. And that Necessity hath bred this new one.

Clytæmnestra. Fearest thou not thy parent's curse, my child?

Orestes. That parent thrust me wildly from my home.

* * * * * * *

Clytæmnestra. Thou hast determined then to slay thy mother?

Orestes. 'Tis thine own crime, not I, will be thy death.

Clytæmnestra. Beware the angry furies which shall haunt thee
On mine account.

Orestes. And, if I spare thy life
Will not the same pursue me, from my father?

Clytæmnestra. To my entreaties thou art deaf as stone.

Orestes. Yes, for my father's murder pricks me on.

Clytæmnestra. Ah me! this is the snake I bore and nourished,
Too true a prophet was my dream last night.

Orestes Enough—thou killedst him thou shouldst have loved,
And thou must suffer like unnatural death.

[*He goes out driving her before him.*]

Thus ends this terrible scene—but the chief power and terror of the play is yet to come. Let not the reader or spectator think that Justice has done her work, or that the matricide will go free. Slowly and fearfully does the mist of madness begin to creep over his mind, from the moment of his mother's death. The angry Furies whom she threatens are not forgetful of their work. We know no passage in ancient or modern poetry so masterly and so awful in effect as that which concludes this play. Driven by destiny into the inextricable nets of crime, the devoted of Heaven to his work, but the *criminal* in and by means of that work, Orestes was the very person whom the spirit of the Grecian drama delighted to pourtray. By such a portrait, all the deep questions of foreknowledge, freewill, and fate, were stirred in the breast: all the sympathies powerfully excited—and the supernatural brought into action in its most awful phase—that of a power on the moral feelings. Here follows the scene of which we speak.

(The Chorus sing first a song full of wild forebodings, and earnest prayers for the ultimate safety of Orestes, who hath done great things, but dreadful.)

Orestes. Behold the pair, the rulers of this land,
And parricidal wasters of mine house.
Majesty clothed them while they held the throne,
In death they are united—their pledged faith
Remains—they pledged destruction to my sire,
And joint destruction to themselves—'tis done.
Behold here also, ye my witnesses,
This fatal garment, within which enwrapped,
Bound hand and foot, my royal father died.

[*Producing the robe which Clytæmnestra had put over Agamemnon in the bath.*]

There, stretch it out—stand round it and display
This human net, that the great Sire may see—
Not *my* sire, but the Sun, whose piercing eye
Beholds all this,—my mother's work impure—
That he may be my witness, that with right
I have sought out and wrought my mother's fall:—
Her paramour's, I count not—he hath died
A shameless caitiff's death. But she, who plotted
For her own husband such a toil as this,
Who loved her children only when she bore them,
But after, loathed them, changed to enemies;
What thinkest thou? Was she some monster fierce
That might corrupt by contact, without wound,
So savage was her nature and so dark?
[*Turning to the robe*]
What may I name it best? Some hunting net,
Some shroud to wrap the dead—some bathing dress,—
Nay, 'tis a toil, a maze, a labyrinth,
A snare to catch the feet—such as some thief
Who lives by way-side plunder would employ,
And it should minister to deeds of blood,
And feed his hot desire. Such bad device
Be far from where I dwell; nay, first
I would be curst to hopeless barrenness.

Chorus, Alas! dire deeds are these!
The king was miserably slain—

But we may see
The poor survivor hurried fast
In mental agonies.

Orestes. Did she the deed or not? Here is my witness,
This garment—here Ægisthus' sword drew blood—
The stain is dried and clotted with long standing,
But ye may see where the rich tints are gone,
Yielding to rusty blooddrops—a brave thrust
Was that—thou didst it nobly, poor Ægisthus!
Methinks this parricidal robe beholding,
I must bewail the miseries of our race,
Clothed as I am with these polluted ensigns
Of an unenvied triumph.

Chorus. Varied is human life—
Not long can happiness prevail—
But we may see
One trouble pressing on the present hour—
Another, close at hand.

Orestes. Aye, and another, and another yet,
Who knows where they will end? I feel me borne,
As by fierce steeds, out of my measured course:
I cannot rule my thoughts—they hurry me
Whither I know not—fear sits at my heart—
Too ready to respond with shriek and dance,
To the fierce wrath without. But while I yet
Speak within reason, I proclaim to ye,
My friends—that I am strong in innocence,
That I have slain my mother with just cause,
That parricidal spot, hated of Heaven.
And I allege that he who charmed me on
To this bold deed, and is the chief in fault,
Is the Oracular God at Delphi's shrine,
Who gave me to believe that doing this,
I should be free from blame:—What ills he threatened
If I obeyed not, 'tis not mine to tell,
Nor yours to guess.
Therefore to his shrine
Will I betake me: there sit suppliant,
With these, a suppliant's tokens; at his fire
Which ever burns, purge off this kindred blood.
For so he ordered—be ye witnesses,
All ye of Argos, how these ancient ills

By me have righted been: and now I fly
An exile from my home, leaving the fame
Of a base matricide, alive or dead.

Chorus. Thou hast well done: call not such evil words
Over thyself—for thou hast set us free
And all thy country men,—having cut down
The towering insult of these monsters twain.

Orestes. Ah! ah! I see them—they are gorgon-eyed,
Clad in black robes,—with hair tangled in knots
Of spotted serpents—I will stay no longer.

Chorus. What fancies turn thy brain? Dearest of all
To thine avenged father, fear thou not.

Orestes. These are no fancies, no imagined fiends—
They are my mother's angry hounds of wrath.

Chorus. The blood is yet unwashen on thine hands—
'Tis this breeds strange disquiet in thy brain.

Orestes. O, king Apollo! there are more in sight!
And noisome blood-drops trickle from their eyes.

Chorus. There is a shrine which will acquit thee safe
From all these ills: Apollo is thy friend.

Orestes. Ye cannot see them—but I see them well—
I am driven hence—and I can stay no more.

[*He rushes out, as one pursued.*]

Chorus. Good speed go with thee, and the god
Who is thy guardian, keep thee safe
In all thy fated trials.

Thus the third tempest now hath burst
Of family destiny
Over these kingly roofs.
First the dread banquet of strange flesh,
Even his own, and all the ills
Which poor Thyestes bore.
Then the base death which overtook
Our victor lord, the hero-king,
Who led the Greeks to war.
And now a third fell stroke hath fall'n,
For ruin or for rescue sent,
For it is yet in doubt.
O, when and where will the great storm of woes
Sink finally to blest repose?

[*The scene closes.*]

The Eumenides or Furies.

The remaining play, the Eumenides or Furies, may be dismissed with a brief notice. Its interest to the Athenians, as will be seen, was chiefly political.

The scene opens in the temple of Apollo at Delphos. Orestes is sitting on the central altar as his sanctuary. The Furies are lying round, sleeping, wearied with their pursuit. Hermes, by command of Apollo, conveys Orestes to Athens, there to take his trial for the murder, under the arbitration of Athena. The ghost of Clytæmnestra rises, and awakens the Furies. 'Your victim is gone—awake—pursue.' They are driven out of the temple by Apollo.

Trial and acquittal of Orestes.

The scene meantime changes to Athens: and Orestes is brought to trial by the court of Areopagus, then first constituted as a tribunal of murder by the tutelary goddess. The judges are appointed: the forms are gone through—the votes for condemnation and acquittal are equal. Athena, as president, gives her casting vote for Orestes. The Furies are at first angry and disappointed—but by degrees, being soothed, and having a temple promised them, they are conducted in peace to their destined place of honour on the Acropolis. Orestes departs, purified and pardoned, to rule his paternal kingdom. The woes of his house are at an end.

Political bearing of this Play.

Now all this had, as we have hinted, a political bearing. At the time when 'the Eumenides' was written and acted, violent attacks had been made on the authority, and even the existence of the Areopagus—the first criminal court in Athens—venerable from immemorial usage, from its strict and simple proceedings, and its unimpeachable integrity of judgment. These attacks were headed by no less a person than the famous Pericles: to whose party, from birth most probably, but certainly from education and disposition, Æschylus was strongly opposed. 'The Eumenides' was written to produce a popular feeling in favour of the Areopagus—ascribing its foundation as a court to their patron goddess, and making her predict the eternity of its duration, and commend it to the safe keeping of her people.

Thus our readers have had an opportunity of reviewing another specimen of Grecian dramatic art, which derives its interest not from ancient mythologies and supernatural actors, but from the destinies of one famity, wrought out by individual passions, but tending towards one fulfilment. They will from the chapters already in their possession be able to see how entirely different a thing Grecian dramatic interest is, from that which would now engage the sympathies of an audience. They will see how insulated the Greek drama stands—and (we would hope) how beautiful it is in that its position.

Our next chapter will bring before them the story of Œdipus, as contained in two plays of Sophocles.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ŒDIPUS OF SOPHOCLES.

Æschylus and Sophocles compared.

OUR readers have as yet only been presented with specimens of Æschylus, the father of the Greek tragedy. In his bold choice of simple and prominent incidents—his love of that which is vast and above nature—and his abrupt and sounding style, we have the true elements of the sublime in poetry, in their first, their birth-form. We now approach a more advanced state of dramatic art; not in point of time so much, as in the character of the Artist's mind. Sophocles and Æschylus were for some years contemporaries on the stage. But while Æschylus was soaring into regions unapproached before, and frequently astonishing his audience by monstrous inventions, and long pompous words, Sophocles was more quietly gaining celebrity by his consummate skill in exhibiting the turns of fate, and the contrasts of human destiny. If Æschylus was the sublimer poet, Sophocles was the more finished artist. In his plays, nothing is wanting, nothing is superfluous. By every entering person, by every speech, the plot is stealthily unfolding; the whole is like an exquisite piece of mosaic, cunningly put together, the distinctive character of each stone visible upon inspection, but all blended beautifully into one general effect. His choral songs also, dropping the wild and abrupt character of those of Æschylus, formed poetic accompaniments to the scenes as they passed; now admonitory to overbearing pride, now consolatory, at another time triumphant hymns of praise, or deep impassioned prayers. His style is in keeping with all this. His

choice of words eminently happy, his sentences full of depth, and yielding deeper meaning upon repeated study; his versification without a fault, singularly smooth and pleasing. Yet Sophocles is never weak. His strength is that of a giant, but he does not use it as a giant.

When you suspect he is uttering common-places, there is deep wisdom beneath; when his images seem merely those of every-day poets, there is on examination a fitness and happiness in them which you never suspected.

It is no wonder then that with ourselves, as in Athens of old, Sophocles should be the favourite. Unblameable symmetry, and perfect polish, are seldom united with the wide grasp of poetic thought, the boundless play of the fancy, 'the vision and the faculty divine;' but where these good things have been married together in one mind, the effect upon us is that clear delight of soul, that perfect complacency and repose of the intellectual man, than which it is difficult to imagine a higher state of pure enjoyment. There is sublimity in the rare and appalling convulsions of nature; the earthquake, the storm, the conflagration, are full, each of its peculiar grandeur; but where among things sudden or strange, can we find such sublimity, as in the perfect and faultless order of the bright throng above us, each knowing his season, and all rolling, vast beyond thought, beautiful beyond compare, round the throne of the Eternal?

Plays of Sophocles: or the Tale of Œdipus.

Therefore we love Sophocles, and therefore we mean that our readers should love him also. And we have chosen for the purpose of recommending him, the subject which occupies the greatest number of his remaining plays—the fortunes of the person and family of Œdipus, king of Thebes. On this subject we have three plays; ŒDIPUS THE KING, ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS, and ANTIGONE. The two former, containing the history of Œdipus himself, will furnish us with ample matter for the present chapter.

Section I. Œdipus the King.

The first of these has universally been esteemed the most perfect drama in existence. The development of the plot is

that in which the author has especially excelled: and that his excellence in that department may be fully perceived, we shall first simply tell the tale of Œdipus, and then give an analysis of the play.

The Tale of Œdipus.

Laïus, king of Thebes in Bœotia, had been warned by an oracle, that if ever he had a son, he should perish by that son's hand. He had a son, Œdipus; who, as soon as born, was delivered to a shepherd to be exposed on mount Cithæron; his feet being pierced and tied with thongs. The exposure however did not take place. The shepherd gave the infant to a fellow herdsman, feeding his flocks on the mountain, and in the service of Polybus, king of Corinth. Polybus and Merope, his queen, had no child. They saw the infant and adopted him; and he grew up as their son. In the course of a drunken quarrel, some one threw out a hint that Œdipus was not the genuine offspring of the blood-royal. This vexed him, and after fruitless enquiry at Corinth respecting his birth, he quitted the country to ask of the oracle at Delphi. There he heard a dreadful announcement: that he should kill his father, and be wedded in incestuous marriage with his mother. To avoid this, (considering those of Corinth as his parents,) he determined not to return, but took the road towards Thebes, a town strange to him. On his way he met, in a place where three roads joined, an old man travelling in a chariot, with a few attendants, He was commanded to give place, and wantonly struck by the old man on his disobedience. His spirit was stirred; and he avenged the insult by the death of the insulter, and all his company, with one exception. This old man was Laïus, king of Thebes, HIS OWN FATHER. He proceeded to the town: found it in dismay and daily losing its citizens under the cruelty of a monster named Sphinx. This Sphinx had proposed a riddle, 'What is that which is two-legged, three-legged, and four-legged?' whoever answered this riddle should vanquish the Sphinx, and deliver the country. A reward was proposed for such a man, the hand of the queen in marriage, and as a consequence the

kingdom for himself. Œdipus was the solver of the riddle; 'The animal,' said he, 'is no other than man: as an infant he has four legs, his own and his nurse's; as a man, he has two; as an aged cripple, he has three, going with a stick.' The Sphinx was vanquished, the city delivered; Œdipus married the queen Jocasta, (HIS OWN MOTHER) and became king of Thebes.

Opening of the play.

Now then opens the play of ŒDIPUS THE KING. Some years have elapsed since the above events. There are born to the king two sons, Eteocles and Polynices; and two daughters, Antigonè and Ismenè; all grown up to the strength of youth.—But the blood of Laïus has cried to heaven—the murder will not rest. Œdipus has forgotten it—the country has forgotten it—but heaven has not. A fearful plague rages in the city. The offspring of their women is shed before its time—the flocks cast their young; the fruits wither in the bud; beauty pales her cheek—strength drops her arm. The king and royal family are exempt. They flourish in enviable happiness, feared and admired. Œdipus, the saviour of his country, stands pre-eminent in glory, and is called '*illustrious*' by all. To him then the attention of the perishing people is turned. They come in procession to his palace, with the priest of Zeus at their head. They sit as supplicants at his gate. They consult the king as to the means of escaping the present evil. His wisdom saved them once; it may again. Could man be on a prouder eminence? He has anticipated them. He is anxious for his people, and has sent the queen's brother, Creon, to inquire of the oracle at Delphi. While they are speaking together, Creon returns; and, as he asserts, with good news. The oracular answer is, that the guilt of blood is on the land. 'Murder has been committed, and the murderer is in the territory. Let but the people find and banish him, or requite blood with blood, and the plague shall cease.' The following conversation ensues:

The pestilence.

The oracle.

Oedipus. To what man's fate do these dark words allude?

Creon. We had, O king, before thou rul'dst the land,
A sovereign, named Laïus
Oedipus. By report
I know his name; I never looked on him.
Creon. 'Tis of his death that we are ordered now
To find the authors and requite their guilt.
Oedipus. And where are they? How may we find again
The long-lost footsteps of this ancient crime?
Creon. In this our land they are declared to be:
Hid, through neglect; but to be found, if sought.
Oedipus. Was Laïus in the palace, or the field,
Or in some foreign land, when he was murdered?
Creon. He left the city on some sacred errand,—
He thus gave out—but he returned no more.
Oedipus. Did no one see it? Had he with him none,
Whom we might find, and take his evidence?
Creon. They perished all save one—he fled through fear,
And one thing only can depose for certain.
Oedipus. What thing? for one thing may draw on the rest,
If it afford us but one clue of hope.
Creon. He says that robbers met him—that he fell,
Not slain by one, but by a company.
Oedipus. How could the robbers, if not bribed with gold
From hence, have been so bold upon their king?
Creon. The same was thought e'en then; but the dead king
Had none to help him to his just revenge.
Oedipus. What urgency of evil was upon you,
That you could not investigate the thing?
Creon. The riddling Sphinx compelled us to attend
To our woes present, and to leave the rest.
Oedipus. But I will sift the matter from the first.
Well hath the God, and well hast thou, bestowed
This care upon the dead: it is but just
That I work with you, on this land's behalf,
And in God's cause. It is not for some friend
Dwelling afar, but for my own well-being,
That I shall strive this stain to wipe away.
For whoso killed the king, the same perchance
May lift just such a hand against *my* life;
Thus in avenging him, I save myself.
But rise, my sons, take up your suppliant boughs;
Let some one summon hither all the people;—

For I will take all steps. Either we rise,
(God grant it,) or we are for ever fallen.

Such is the state of the king's mind—fully determined to leave no stone unturned, by turning which he may throw light on this mysterious transaction. A song follows from the Chorus, praying for success in the investigation, and describing finely the misery of the present state of things. We shall give our readers one chorus of Sophocles—but it shall not be this, though this well deserves their admiration. The assembly is gathered, and there follows another speech from Œdipus, awfully to be fulfilled in the person of the unconscious speaker.

The denunciation.

Whoever be the man, I interdict
All of this land, of which I hold the power,
From lodging him, or greeting him with words,
Or making him partaker in the prayers
Offered in public,—or in sacrifice:
But I command ye all to thrust him out,
As our pollution; thus the god hath said.
So strong a succour shall mine office bring
To the god's cause, and to the king that's gone.
Thus I devote the murderer,—whether *one*
Hath done it, or the secret lie with more,—
May he drag out a wretched life, unblest.*
And I pray further, if within my house
He be contained, and with my consciousness,
That I may suffer all I have invoked.
And all these things I solemnly conjure
You to perform, both on my own behalf,
And for the god who hath revealed thus far,
And for this land, thus miserably lost,
Reft of her children, without hope from heaven.

* It is impossible to avoid expressing our thanks to the author of a very sensible article in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, Sept. 1839, for his exposure of the childish criticisms of Porson and his followers, by which just the most beautiful lines in the Greek tragedies, (being those in which the effect is given by the very irregularity complained of,) have been reduced to dead monotony. It is to be hoped that the efforts of such scholars as the writer of that article will restore us, among other lost treasures, the beautiful and expressive word ἄμοιρον in this line. Porson's substitute, ἄμορον, (besides being found in no manuscript, for which these gentlemen care little,) has not the same force either of sound, or, as appears to us, of meaning.

Further conversation ensues: in the course of which the Chorus advise the king to send for the blind prophet Teiresias, who knows all things. 'It has been done,' replies the king, 'on the advise of Creon; I have sent twice, and wonder that he has not come some time since.' Alas! there was too much reason why he should be unwilling to come! After long delay, he does come: but he is gloomy and desponding. To the king's entreaties that he will reveal what he knows concerning the murderer, he only replies, 'Ask me not; it is not wise,' and at last positively refuses to say more. He had forgotten, he says, for the moment, what was the object of the enquiry, or he would never have come.

At this refusal, the king's anger is roused: he turns to reproaches, and accuses the prophet of having himself advised and assisted in the deed, if his hands did not perpetrate it. Such a charge kindles wrath in return; and the awful secret escapes from the lips of Teiresias.

The prophetic disclosure.

Teiresias. Dost thou say so? I charge thee from this hour,
According to the law thyself hast made,
Never to speak word more to these, nor me,—
For THOU ART HE THAT DOTH POLLUTE THE LAND!

Oedipus. Wretch! and how think'st thou to escape this word,
Thus in thine anger insolently uttered?

Teiresias. As I best may: the truth is my defence.

Oedipus. Who taught thee this? for it was not thine art.

Teiresias. Thyself—for thou didst force me to disclose it.

Oedipus. To disclose what? speak it again, and clearer.

Teiresias. Didst thou not understand? art tempting me?

Oedipus. I understand not well:—repeat it me.

Teiresias. I say THOU ART THE MURDERER WHOM THOU SEEKEST.

Oedipus. It is not safe for thee to say this twice.

Teiresias. Shall I say more, and rouse thine anger further?

Oedipus. Say what thou wilt; for all thy words are vain.

Teiresias. I say that thou unconsciously dost hold
Unhallowed intercourse with those thou lovest,
And canst not see what horrors gird thee round.

Oedipus. Shall thy bold tongue run on unpunished thus?

Teiresias. Yea, if there be but any force in truth.

Oedipus. There is, except for thee—thou speakest none:
Thine ears, thy mind, thine eyes, are blind alike.
Teiresias. Unhappy man! thou castest taunts at me,
Which on *thyself* each tongue shall shortly turn.

Awful denunciations—but true. The king's rage continues. Who can have suggested such a thought to the old man? It must have been Creon—he is nearest to the throne—no doubt it is a conspiracy got up by Creon. As such Œdipus treats it—shutting his ears to the things which Teiresias is disclosing. 'Thou art a fool,' says he to the old prophet. 'Thy parents thought not so,' is the reply. 'MY PARENTS? WHAT PARENTS?' cries the bewildered king. 'Thou knowest them not. This day shall shew thee thy birth, and thy ruin.' With other such fearful hints, the prophet departs, having first given the king a catalogue of the miseries about to happen to him, and pledged his prophetic skill for their fulfilment.

Soon Œdipus and Creon meet. High words ensue. Let us pause a little here to reflect on the skill of the poet. Œdipus has found the truth which he sought. Were he but humble and patient, the heavy blow might be softened in its descent on him. But in his pride of kinglihood, he braves it out. It must be a treasonable design—and he contrives to involve himself in a quarrel with Creon, the most faithful upholder of his throne. Now let us mark the awful unfolding of the truth before the eyes of this wilful king.

Disclosure the first.

The queen overhears the dispute between Œdipus and Creon. She enters to pacify them. She enquires into the cause of the quarrel. It is told her. She asks the source of the informatioon. 'That unprincipled prophet,' replies the king, 'whom he sent to me.' The conversation proceeds thus:

Jocasta. Leave thou thy care about thyself, and hear
While I shall prove, that in this world of ours
There is no man that hath prophetic arts.
Short is my proof:—an oracle once came
To Laius, (I say not from the god,
But from his servants) that his fate should be

To die by his son's hands, who should be born
Of me, and him. Now Laïus was slain,
As report goes, by thieves from a strange land,
Where three ways meet:—whereas our infant child,
Not three days from its birth, was thrown to die
With its feet pierced, upon the savage rocks.
So that Apollo saved him not, to be
The murderer of his father, nor did Laïus
Suffer the ill he dreaded from his son.
Such things the prophets prophesied: for whom
Care not thou aught. For whatsoever things
The gods have use, them will they bring to light.

Oedipus. What stir of thoughts, and dread uncertainty
Come o'er me as I listen to thy speech!

Jocasta. What new suggestion turns thee from thy course?

Oedipus. I thought I heard thee say, that Laïus
Came by his death where three highroads diverge.

Jocasta. So it was said, and hath not been denied.

Oedipus. Where lies the spot where this encounter happened?

Jocasta. The country is called Phocis; and the roads
From Delphi and from Daulia join in one.

Oedipus. How long a time hath past, since these things were?

Jocasta. Not long before thou didst receive the power
Over this country, were the tidings brought.

Oedipus. Father of heaven! what wilt thou do with me?

Jocasta. What is this panic which hath fallen upon thee?

Oedipus. Ask me not yet—but tell me, I beseech thee,
What form had Laïus? how was he in years?

Jocasta. Of stature large,—hoary with whitening locks;
His general aspect *not unlike thine own.*

Oedipus. Alas! I fear me, I have cast *myself*
Unwary, upon curses deep and dread.

Jocasta. How sayest thou? I quake to look on thee.

Oedipus. I sorely dread the prophet shall prove true.
But tell me one thing more, and I shall know.

Jocasta. I fear—but I will answer, if I know.

Oedipus. Was he but slightly tended, or did soldiers
Guard him around, as did beseem a king?

Jocasta. They were but five in all—one was a herald;
There was one chariot, in which Laïus rode.

Oedipus. Ah me! 'tis all too plain. Who was the man
Who brought these tidings to the citizens?

Jocasta. A servant, who escaped alone with life.
Oedipus. Is he at present in the palace here?
Jocasta. No—when he thence returned, and beheld thee
Having the power, and his old master dead,
He prayed me earnestly to send him forth
To the sheep pasture, that he might be far
From this our city. He prevailed with me,
For he was worthy, as a slave may be,
To have this favour, or a greater granted.
Oedipus. Are there not means to bring him here again?
Jocasta. There are: but why shouldst thou desire to see him?
Oedipus. Lady, I fear that I have heard full much
To make me wish an interview with him.

The servant is sent for: meanwhile, at Jocasta's request, the king relates his past life, and the occurrence in question. Now, thinks the reader, all is clear. The plot is very well developed. You may think so—but *all* is yet to come. The dark cloud has passed over which heralds the storm—there may be sunshine yet before the tempest breaks. There is yet one small hope—a straw at which Œdipus may catch. 'The servant said Laïus died by *robbers*. Now if he shall stand to this, I am yet free—I am not the murderer.' Such is the state of things, when the Chorus take up their song, and indulge in wild questionings respecting the certainty of oracles—those given to Laïus it appears were not true—he did not die by his son—how can these things be? Rays of hope.

The strain is ending when Jocasta enters with votive offerings for the safety of her lord and house, in fear and trembling. 'Œdipus is terror-stricken,' she says, 'and is at the mercy of every one who can excite his mind. What shall the crew do when their pilot is aghast with fear?'

At this point a foreign messenger, dusty and way-worn, enquires for the palace of Œdipus. He is from Corinth—and brings the news of the death of Polybus the king there, and of the succession of Œdipus to the vacant throne. This intelligence changes all into joy. *Where are the oracles now?* Œdipus was to kill his father: but now he has died a natural death, in a good old age.

Oedipus. Ha, ha! why should one shape one's course of life
After oracular voices, or regard
The birds that clang above us? *They* decreed
That I should slay my father—but he lies
Already dead—and I am here in Thebes
Raising no arm against him—but forsooth
He *may* have died for grief at loss of me—
And thus I may have killed him! Well, he lies
Low, and the oracles are with him gone.
Jocasta. Told I not thee as much, when this begun?
Oedipus. Thou didst: but I was borne away by fear.
Jocasta. Think then no more of oracles henceforth.

Disclosure the second.

There is but one thorn in this garland of pleasure—and that is derived from the very superstition which Œdipus has been just deriding. His mother, (as he thinks) Merope, yet lives—the oracle denounced that he should commit incest with her—he cannot go to Corinth. 'If that be all,' says the messenger, 'I can free you from that fear.' 'Do it,' says the king, 'and thou shalt be rewarded.'

How soon an airy fabric of pleasure and hope is crushed down by one word—one surmise—one dash of a pen! even so is it with Œdipus. The messenger frees him from his fear—THEY WERE NOT THY PARENTS!! 'How was it then?' Now the blackness is gathering. The tale is told—at the hands of this very messenger did the king of Corinth receive the helpless infant Œdipus. He refers him to his pierced feet for confirmation of his story. One link alone is wanting—the shepherd who took the babe must be sent for. He *has* been sent for—it is the same as the surviving servant of Laïus.

But who shall tell the unutterable woes of the horror-stricken queen? who shall paint her wild agony, as she conjures her husband (now, alas! combining with that *another name*) to enquire no further? But BLINDNESS—the very reproach which he cast on the prophet, has happened to the wretched king—he still, even still, misapprehends the whole matter. He answers the queen:

Blindness—mental.

Be of good courage—if I shall turn out
A *slave by three descents*, thou art no worse.

He thinks it is only the nobility and genuineness of his birth which are at question, and attributes Jocasta's fear to her unwillingness to be found wedded to one of low descent.

Jocasta. Oh, I beseech thee—stir this thing no further!
Oedipus. Nought shall persuade me not to search it out.
Jocasta. 'Tis thy best interests that I have at heart.
Oedipus. Ah, this *expedience* long has been my bane.
Jocasta. Oh wretched man, may'st thou ne'er know thy birth?
Oedipus. Will some one bring this shepherd here to me?
Let her alone, to boast her noble blood.
Jocasta. Oh wretch, wretch, wretch! this is my latest word—
For I shall speak to thee no more for ever!
[*She rushes out in an agony of grief and terror.*]
Chorus. Whither hath fled the queen, by her wild grief
Hurried away? I fear me much, O king,
Lest from her silence some great harm break forth.
Oedipus. Break forth what will; but as for me, my birth,
Be it but common, I am bent to find.
It seems that she (for she hath lofty thoughts)
Blushes to own my lowly pedigree.
'Tis no dishonour—I avow myself
The child of Fortune—she hath given me much—
She is my mother—and the months, my nurses,
Have portioned out my lot for weal or woe.
Such being born, I cannot be so low
That I should shrink from searching out my race.

Alas, poor king! the cloud is already over him, and his chambers are darkening with its gloom. There follows a choric song, which heightens that gloom. It is joyous and sportive—the white butterfly which flutters before the blackness and makes one feel it more intensely. It is not the Chorus of which we spoke above, but it is short, so we will give it.

If I might a claim advance
To the keen prophetic glance,
I would prophesy, that soon,
Ere the wane of yonder moon,

Thou, Cithæron,* shalt be famed
In the dance and in the song—
Thou, the royal birthplace named—
Thou, who didst our sovereign rear, thy woods and rocks among.
Such, O Phœbus, be thy care:
Thou heavenly archer, grant our prayer.

Who of nymphs thy life began?
By the mountain rover, Pan,
Wooed to love, or the bright Power
Phœbus, who knows every bower,
And each mountain pasture fine:
Or perchance Cyllene's king,†
Or the god of rosy wine,
On the hill tops revelling,
Thee, a foundling child, did raise,
Dropt by the nymphs with whom he plays.

Disclosure the third and last.

The fatal interview now arrives—the storm is ready to burst. The old servant enters. He is unwilling to speak: but the importunity and threats of the king at length extort from him the whole: how he received the child at the palace, and from the queen's own hands, with command to kill it: how he pitied it, and gave it to the Corinthian shepherd.

Oedipus. Alas! alas! then it must all be true!
Thou light of heaven, farewell! I look on thee
Now for the last time—I, who have been proved
Of an unnatural birth—unnatural
In my foul marriage—and the perpetrator
Of an unnatural, parricidal murder.
[*Exit.*

The mirth of the Chorus is turned into mourning.

Race of mortals on the earth
How I count ye nothing worth?
Who has more of human bliss
Than enough to think it his?
And before the dream is past
It declines, and will not last.

* The mountain on which Œdipus was exposed when an infant.
† Hermes, or Mercury.

It is now the reign of woe. Another messenger enters—'The queen is dead! her own hands have done it.' And the wretched Œdipus?

Blindness—corporeal.

Behold him once more. * 'The eyes which have served him so ill, which have seen without discerning what it was most important for him to know, have been for ever extinguished. And in this condition, most wretched, most helpless, he enters once more, to exhibit a perfect contrast to his appearance in the opening scene, and thus to reverse that *irony* of which we have hitherto seen but one side. While he saw the light of day, he had been ignorant, infatuated, incapable of distinguishing truth from falsehood, friend from foe. Now he clearly perceives all that concerns him: he is conscious of the difference between his own shrewdness and the divine intelligence: he is cured of his rash presumption, of his hasty suspicions, of his doubts and cares: he has now a sure test of Creon's sincerity, and he finds that it will stand the trial.'

With the speech of the Chorus, which concludes the play, we will conclude our notice of it:

> Behold ye men of Thebes, this Œdipus—
> Who solved the famous riddle, and was high
> Above us all in power, and envied none
> His fortunes, nor his ease—into what depth
> Of dark adversity he now hath fallen.
> Call then no mortal happy on this side
> Of his departure hence: not till his life
> Hath reached its end, free from all misery.

Section II. Œdipus at Colonos.

It is reported, we hope not truly, that Sophocles had evil and unthankful sons: who, when grey hairs were upon him, represented to the magistrates that he was imbecile and unable to manage his property. In his defence, he recited the play on which we are about to enter, and which he had

* We quote from a masterly article, by the Bishop of St. David's, in the Philological Museum, vol. ii. pp. 483—537, 'On the Irony of Sophocles.'

just then finished composing. He was covered with praises, and his sons with shame. Listen then, gentle reader, with the more interest.

It was in the high and palmy state of Athens. Theseus (duk Theseus himself—the Theseus of the Canterbury Tales, and the Midsummer Night's Dream) held the sway. He was the friend of the oppressed, the foe of the oppressor. All in Athens was good government and order.

Two miles from the city rose the hillock and grove of Colonos—one of those sweet dreaming places for the lover and the poet, which weave their way into our hearts, and which we determine to celebrate in song—one of nature's own lecture-rooms, where by the leaves and the flowers, the gnarled boles and feathery mosses, the song of birds and the hum of bees, she speaks deep and lasting lessons in the ear of her scholar. It was besides a sacred grove. What nature lavished on it, religion hallowed. If we know the heart of a poet, it was very dear to Sophocles—he owed to it many a tender thought, many a gentle dream, many a sweet union of words, revealed to him he knew not how, and worked in afterwards in immortal verse.

Opening of the play.

Place yourself in imagination beside this same grove: for there our drama opens. Enter not; the ground is too holy. The venerable goddesses—the Furies—called by way of propitiation the Gracious Ones, have claimed it as their own. Two persons are approaching. An old man, blind and feeble, is guided and supported by a light and slender girl. Their garb is poor; the very rags of beggary hang about them. But their bearing is that of no common beings. Listen—he speaks:

> Child of a blind old man, Antigonè,
> Whither have we arrived? what men are they
> That own this city? who will now relieve
> The wanderér Œdipus, with scanty gifts
> Sufficient for the day? Little he asks,
> Receiving less,—but still enough for me.

Content is taught me by adversity,
Now of long standing—and my inborn firmness
Bears up, and murmurs not. But, O my child,
If any seat thou seest, either on ground
Which may be trodden, or by sacred grove,
Place me, and seat me down; that we may find
What is this place: for we are come to learn
Our duty—and when known, to accomplish it. *

Antigonè. My poor old father, as mine eyes can judge,
The towers, that crown the city, are yet distant:—
But this, 'tis clear, is some fair hallowed spot,
Lavish in growth of olive, bay, and vine;
And in the grove unnumbered nightingales
Are sweetly trilling: hither, bend thy limbs
Upon this native rock:—for I have led thee,
For one so old and feeble, a long journey.

Oedipus. Seat me then down, and guard me, weak and blind.

Antigonè. Long have I learnt to do this office for thee.

Oedipus. Canst thou inform me whither we have come?

Antigonè. I know, near Athens: but this spot I know not.

Oedipus. Each traveller told us this, as we came on.

Antigonè. Shall I then go and ask, and bring thee word?

Oedipus. Enquire, my child,—if any house be near.

Antigonè. There is,—but stay,—it seems I need not go:
For there is now a man approaching us.

Oedipus. Approaching this same spot where now we are?

Antigonè. Yes, and ev'n now he's present; whatsoe'er
Thou hast to ask him, thou canst ask him now.

Oedipus. Stranger, hearing from her, who sees for me
And for herself, that thou hast come to us,
In fitting time to answer all our doubts,——

Stranger. Before thou askest more, from that thy seat
Depart—the ground is not for thee to tread.

Oedipus. What is the place—what god possesses it?

Stranger. Not to be touched nor built in. The dire Powers,
Daughters of Earth and Darkness, dwell in it.

Oedipus. What is their name, that I may pray to them?

Stranger. The people here ('tis various otherwhere)
Call the all-seeing Powers, Eumenides.

* It had been announced to Œdipus that when he should come to the grove hallowed to the Furies, his life should end. Under this presentiment (though not yet knowing the place) he speaks.

Oedipus. Dread goddesses, receive your suppliant, *
For I will quit no more this spot of earth.
Stranger. What may this mean?
Oedipus. A symbol of my fate.
Stranger. I may not move thee, till I know the will
Of those that govern here, and have my orders.

To his further enquiries the stranger replies, acquainting him with the circumstances of the place and country. He requests that the king Theseus may be sent for. The stranger is amazed. 'Why should he come to a blind old beggar?' 'Leave that to me,' replies Œdipus, 'I know what I say. Let him come, he shall gain much.' The stranger goes, to confer with his fellow villagers, who are to determine what is to be done. Œdipus and his daughter are alone.

Oedipus. My child, is the man gone?
Antigonè. He is, my father:
So that thou now can'st speak to me alone.
Oedipus. Ye venerable Goddesses,—'tis well
That on your ground I have first placed myself
In this new land;—be ye not then averse
From me, nor from the Prophet god, who first
When he denounced the sorrows of my life,
Declared, that after long years they should cease,
When I should come and seat me in your precincts;
That the point and crisis of my life should be
At that same time:—and I should bring rich gain
To them with whom I died, but bane and loss
To those of my own land, who thrust me forth:
And that some sign should come in proof of this,
Earthquake, or thunder, or the flash from heaven.
I know, I feel it, that some happy omen
Hath brought me to this grove,—sent by yourselves.
For otherwise I should not have approached
You first in this my journey, in fit state
For sacrifice, and sat me down as here:
Wherefore, dread Powers, according to the word

* The rights of a *suppliant* were strictly revered in Ancient Greece—once at the altar or on the spot sacred to the god to whom he fled, it was considered sacrilege forcibly to remove him.

Prophetic, grant me now some turning point,
Some *passage* of my life, unless I seem
To have too little tasted of the cup
Of bitter sorrow: I, who feed and serve
The deepest pangs that mortal breast can feel.
Come, blessed progeny of Darkness old,
Come, thou fair city, honoured with the name
Of great Athena, pity the poor shade
Of Œdipus—I am not what I was.

But we forget that we must not translate the whole play; and we have yet some long passages which will not bear mere reporting. Our readers will thank us for quoting from the same source as above, the following notice of this appearance of Œdipus:

"In the first scene the appearance of Œdipus presents a complete reverse of that which we witnessed at the opening of the preceding play. We now see him stript of all that then seemed to render his lot so enviable, and suffering the worst miseries to which human nature is liable. He is blind, old, destitute: an outcast from his home, an exile from his country, a wanderer in a foreign land: reduced to depend on the guidance and support of his daughter, who herself needs protection, and to subsist on the scanty pittance afforded him by the compassion of strangers, who, whenever they recognize him, view him with horror. But a change has likewise taken place within him, which compensates even for his load of affliction. In the school of adversity he has learnt patience, resignation, and content. The storm of passion has subsided, and has left him calm and firm. The cloud has rolled away from his mental vision, and nothing disturbs the clearness and serenity of his views. He not only contemplates the past in the light of truth, but feels himself instinct with prophetic powers. He is conscious of a charmed life, safe from the malice of man and the accidents of nature, and reserved by the gods for the accomplishment of high purposes. The first incident that occurs to him marks in the most signal manner the elevation to which he has been raised by his apparent fall, and the privilege he has gained by the calamity which separates him from the rest of mankind. He has been driven out of Thebes as a wretch polluted, and polluting the land. Yet he finds a resting place in the sanctuary of the awful goddesses, the avengers of crime, whose unutterable name fills every heart with horror, whose ground is too holy for any

human foot to tread. For him there is no terror in the thought of them: he shrinks not from their presence, but greets them as friends and ministers of blessing. He is, as he describes himself, not only a pious but a sacred person." *

Now the Chorus enters, being composed of the inhabitants of the village or district. Much conversation ensues, in which Œdipus makes himself known to them on their earnest enquiries. They are horror-stricken, and wish to thrust him out of the land. Antigonè intercedes, and Œdipus in a beautiful speech reproaches them with being unworthy of the great name of Athens, for protecting the stranger and friendless. They are content to refer the matter to the judgment of the king, when he shall arrive. And now a new person comes on the stage; his other daughter, Ismené. The sons come not and care not for him. They are ruling at home, or fighting for the rule. After the Egyptian custom, the daughters endure toil and wait on their aged father, while their brothers are idle or worse.

But why comes Ismené? she has been to consult the oracles on her father's future destiny. What say they? why, that the land in which Œdipus shall die, shall be happy and victorious; that therefore the Thebans who before cast him out, were now most anxious to have him back, and that Creon was coming for that very purpose, to fetch him that he may die in his own land. To this proposal he gives an indignant and stern refusal, and pronounces a solemn curse upon his rebellious sons, which he will not mitigate even on the personal request of Polynices the younger, backed by the entreaties of his own Antigonè.

There follows a strife between Theseus and Creon for the possession of the illustrious exile, in which Creon, after attempting to give Œdipus pain by taking away his daughter, is finally dismissed in no favourable light. We have hurried over this part of the play to come to its sublime and awful catastrophe; but in doing so we must not forget that it

* 287 ἥκω γὰρ ἱερὸς εὐσεβής τε.

contains the very Chorus of which we have twice spoken, and which is beyond dispute, the most beautiful and perfect piece of choric poetry in the Greek language. There is none of the wild inspiration of the Chorus in the Agamemnon (see chap. vii.) nor, as we shall hereafter see, is there the deep pathos of the choric songs of Euripides; but in luxury of beauty, and all that pleases and delights the poetic mind, it surpasses them both. No poet but Sophocles ever could have written it. After such praise, how shall we translate it? Its subject may be called 'the glories of Athens.'

Stranger, thou hast bent thy way
To the region favoured most
Of all this Attic coast;
To Colonos' sunny hill,
Where the nightingale doth trill
Her thick notes on every spray:
Building in the deep green dells
'Midst the purple ivy-bells;
Or beneath the leafy vine,
Glorious with its pendant fruit,
Which no wind doth stir, nor heat
On its branches fiercely beat,
But 'tis sacred, branch and root,
To the jolly god of wine.
Here each day its clusters fair
The narcissus brings to light,
Nursed by soft dews at night;
Ancient crown of these dread powers;
Here the gold-bright crocus flowers;
Nor doth clear Cephissus spare
Bubbling waters, without rest
Oozing from the damp earth's breast,
Trickling o'er the verdant plain,
Fed with showers of purest rain.
Not the Muses' happy band
Hate the spot: nor she above
With her golden-reined hand,
Queen of Beauty and of Love.

Here there is, what Asia's soil
Bears not, nor the neighbouring land

Of Pelops; springing without toil,
Feared by every hostile band,
The grey-leaved, fruitful olive-tree;
Not the fierce invader king
To its leaves could mischief bring;
For the eye of mighty Jove
Looks upon it from above;
And our grey-eyed patroness *
With her care its fruit doth bless.

Yet is due another meed
Of just praise, to this our land.
Its chief boast, the warlike steed,
And the ships that crown our strand.
'Twas thy gift, thou ocean king,
With the rein the horse to guide:—
Smooth and swift thy vessels glide
O'er the wave, propelled along
By the crew with oarage strong;
Bearing graceful company
To the nymphs that rove the sea.

Such is the poet's tribute to his far-famed country.—But the play proceeds. The time is now drawing near when Œdipus must die. The crisis of his fate is at hand. But no common death awaits him. While he is talking a loud thunder-clap is heard.

Oedipus. My children, is there here a messenger
Who may fetch hither the illustrious Theseus?
Antigonè. What is the cause for which thou callest him?
Oedipus. This winged thunder soon will drive me hence
Into the shades below. Send quickly for him.
Chorus. Hark the thunder sharp and clear
Crashes through the middle air;
Terror lifts my very hair;
All my courage faints with fear.
There again! the forked flame
Shot across the upper sky;

* Athena. The legend was that Athena and Poseidon the sea-god, vied with each other in giving gifts to the city. He gave the war-horse and the ship; she the olive. Two invaders of Athens are alluded to: Xerxes, who cut down the sacred olives, but they sprung again miraculously; and Archidamus, king of Sparta, who spared them.

Some calamity is nigh;
For nought such tempest never came.

The thunderings continue, and shortly Theseus arrives. Œdipus tells him that these signs from heaven indicate the end of his life to be at hand. He then proceeds:

I, son of Ægeus, will inform thee now
What great advantage, never to be lost,
Shall fall to this thy city. I will go,
Without a leader, and myself point out
The spot where I must die, and be entombed.
This spot do thou keep secret; tell to none
Its actual site, nor near what part it lies;
That it may ever give thee strength, more sure
Than banks of shields, or mercenary spear.
The things which may not now be spoken forth,
Thyself shall know, when thither we arrive;
For I will tell them to no human ear,—
Not to my daughters here, dear though they be.
Keep thou thyself the secret, and when near
Thine end, disclose it to the worthiest man,
To him alone: and let from time to time
Each from the other learn it. Thus shall ye
Live in fair victory, from the Thebans safe.
* * * * * *
Let us now go, and seek the fated spot;
The signs from heaven are hastening me away.
My children, follow: I am now your leader,
Even as ye have been mine; advance with me,
But touch me not—myself will find the place
Where I am destined to be laid in earth.
This way, this way: Hermes, the guide of the dead,*
Beckons me hither,—and the infernal goddess.
O Light, to me no light, once thou wert mine;
Now thou shalt touch my sightless eyes no more.
I am descending to the shades of death.
Fare well, thou generous stranger, and fare well
This land of thine, and these thy citizens,
Fare well, and prosper; and in fortune's noon,
Forget not me, though dead,—but thankful be.

* It was believed that Hermes conveyed the spirits of the departed down to the shades.

Death of Œdipus.

Œdipus, the king, Antigonè and Ismené are gone; the blind old man leading the way by divine impulse to the spot of his death. There follows an interval of awful suspense, during which the chorus prays for a safe and an easy dismissal for the man of many and deep woes.

Soon a messenger arrives, announcing that Œdipus is dead.

Chorus. Was it by some Heaven-sent and easy death?
Messenger. 'Twas wondrous all. Just as he went from here,
(Thou sawest him,) even so, with none to lead him,
He called us on, and pointed us the way.
But when he reached yon threshold steep, built up
With brazen steps, where many ways divide,
On one of these he stood, near to the vase
Where lie the pledges of eternal friendship
Of Theseus and Peirithous; between which
And the Thorycian rock, stopping midway,
Beside the hollow fig-tree and the tomb,
He sat him down, and loosed his beggar's garb.
And called his daughters, bidding them to bring
Ewers of pure spring water, both to wash,
And pour libations. They to a hill in sight,
Sacred to green Demeter,* went forthwith,
And washed him, and adorned him, as he bid.
This service done, and nothing wanting now
Of all that he desired,—the god below
Spoke forth in thunder; the two virgins trembled,
Falling and weeping at their father's feet,
Beating their breasts, and shrieking loud and shrill.
He, when he heard their long and bitter cries,
Folding his arms around them, said, 'My children,
'From this day forth your father is no more.
'My life is at an end; no more hard service
'Shall I require from you; I know 'twas hard—
'But there was that which recompensed it all—
'For none could love ye better, than he whom
'This day shall snatch away, and leave you orphans.'
Embracing thus, they wept—and when their tears
Were spent, there was short silence; when a voice,
Sudden and dreadful, called for Œdipus,

* Ceres.

So that our hair stood up for very terror.
'ŒDIPUS, ŒDIPUS, WHY TARRY WE?
'TOO LONG DOST THOU DELAY.' He, when he heard
The god, called out for Theseus: 'Best of friends,'
He cried, 'give me thy hand in pledge, and ye,
'My children, give to him; and promise here
'That thou wilt never leave them, but wilt do
'All that is fitting for their future good.'
He, nobly firm, made promise with an oath.
Then Œdipus, for both his children feeling.
Touched them, and said: 'Bear up—for ye must go
'And leave me now, contented not to see
'Nor hear, forbidden things. Leave us alone,
'King Theseus, and myself: for he must know
'What shall be done.' We heard, and with the virgins
Retreated weeping. Soon we saw approach,
Not Œdipus, for he was seen no more,—
But the affrighted king, his shadowing hand
Holding before his eyes, as if some sight
Dazzling and dreadful had bewildered them.
And then we saw him fall upon the ground
And worship earth and heaven in the same prayer.
But by what death HE perished, none can know
Except the king alone. Not fiery bolt
Hath scorched him, nor fierce whirlwind borne away;
But 'twas some heavenly escort rapt him hence,
Or some gulf opened in the kindly ground,
And earth received him, calm, without a pang.
He is not to be mourned,—for he died not
As others, by disease: but marvellous
And glorious was his end beyond example.

The play finishes with the lamentation of Antigonè and Ismené, thus deprived of the venerable object of their pious care.

And we must also conclude this our chapter, which in our desire to lay these wonderful master-pieces complete before our readers, has, we fear, out-run all reasonable length.

May we be permitted to transcribe here a sonnet elsewhere published, but apposite to our present subject?

Colonos! can it be that thou hast still
Thy laurel, and thine olive, and thy vine?
Do thy close-feathered nightingales yet trill
Their warbles of thick sobbèd song divine?
Does the gold sheen o' the crocus o'er thee shine,
And dew-fed clusters of the daffodil,
And round thy flowery knots Cephisus twine,
Aye oozing up with many a bubbling rill?
O might I stand beside thy leafy knoll
In sight of the far city-towers, and see
The faithful-hearted, pure Antigonè
To the dread precinct leading sad and slow
That awful temple of a kingly soul
Lifted to heaven by unexampled woe!

CHAPTER X.

EURIPIDES.—THE ALCESTIS.

* * * * the repeated air
Of sad Electra's poet had the power
To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.
Milton. Sonnets.

As Greece is wonderful among nations, so Athens was wonderful in Greece. In poetical, philosophical, oratorical eminence, that city far outshone all its rivals in arts and arms. There the universal ear was ready tuned to high and cunning melodies, which elsewhere are lost in forgetfulness before they reach the slow and callous perceptions of their hearers. There Providence had prepared the highest order of human intellect to take the lead in every department of mental excellence; and the highest order of subject material for it to work upon.

In no more striking particular are these remarks exemplified than in the co-existence and almost co-equality of the three great tragedians, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Of these, the two former have already been brought before our readers. They have gazed upon the abrupt and superhuman grandeur of Æschylus; have admired the consummate skill and artist-power of Sophocles; and now they will have a poet brought before them, deficient in both the excellences of the other two, but clothed in a peculiar manner with an excellence entirely his own. Euripides is the poet of the sympathies of the human heart—the mighty master of hope and fear and tender affection. He is, of the three great masters, unquestionably the greatest *Dramatist*, in the modern sense of

the word. He is also of the three, the greatest *lyric poet;* his choral songs being perfect poems, and abounding in gorgeous imagery and melody of diction, more than is the case either in the plays of Æschylus or Sophocles. Still Euripides has his faults; and they are great ones. He was much derided by the critics and the wits of his day for degrading poetry into a household thing, and introducing into the high intercourse of gods and heroes the petty cares of every-day life. Certainly, considering the lofty structure of ancient Tragedy, the accusation was not unjust. There was in Euripides a yearning after the realities of human feeling, incongruous with the entirely artificial *casting* of the Attic drama. He was also charged with a leaning towards the obscure and mystical; an imputation which the poets of the human heart have been compelled to bear, from his time to the present; and a bias to which, from the very depth of that wonderful science which they handle, they must ever be in some measure prone. Euripides had studied under Anaxagoras the philosopher, whose unfettered speculations in matters held sacred at Athens had procured for him persecution and banishment. To him, doubtless, we owe many of the 'guesses at truth' which occur in the poetry of Euripides, and they, it must be confessed, are tinged with the same free-thinking spirit. It was also objected to him that his plots were deficient in moral tendency, resting frequently on incidents which the decencies of society forbade to bring forward into prominence. The charge can hardly be denied, while at the same time it must be insisted on, that Euripides is not an impure poet; and that these his transgressions are rather the blunders of a weak judgment, than the tokens of a depraved moral sense. In the very plays in which they occur, the handling of the plot, and the dialogue throughout, is purity itself; and after all, we must remember that the awful crimes of Œdipus, and the matricide of Orestes, were subjects treated alike by the three.

Out of the three most beautiful plays of our author,* we have selected as a specimen of his peculiar powers, that entitled the ALCESTIS. We are strongly tempted, instead of following our usual plan, to give our readers an almost entire translation of this beautiful play; avoiding if possible, on the one hand, the stiffness of a literal version, and on the other, the fault of clothing what is essentially Grecian poetry in a dress adapted to English and modern habits.

It should be premised, that neither according to our own notions, nor to those of the ancients, is this play a perfect tragedy. In its latter part a comic tendency prevails, and a melodramatic interest is given by the introduction into the house of mourning of a boisterous and apparently annoying personage, but through whose agency the happy event is brought about.

But now to the play. Euripides has a custom of introducing a prologue telling the whole story of the plot, which will save us the trouble.†

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

Admètus, king of Pheræ in Thessaly
Pheres, father of Admetus.
Eumèlus, son of Admètus.
A servant.
The god Apollo.
Hercules, not yet deified.
Death.
Alcestis, wife to Admetus.
A maidservant.
Chorus of inhabitants of Pheræ.

SCENE.

Before the Palace of Admètus at Pheræ.

Enter Apollo.

Apollo. Hail, palace of Admetus, in which I,
Although a god, once suffered servitude.

* No one will dispute the preeminence of the Ion, the Iphigeneia in Aulis, and the Alcestis.

† Some liberties of omission have been taken, especially where the short choric strains of which the *music* formed the charm, would be wearisome and tautological to the modern reader.

Zeus was the cause: who having killed my son,
Asclepius,* with his transfixing bolt,
Provoked my vengeance, so that I destroyed
The Cyclops, forgers of his fiery darts.
For this th' almighty Father sentenced me
To be a slave beneath a mortal master.
Into this land I came, and tended herds;
Blameless myself, a master free from blame
Fell to my lot; in gratitude to whom
Up to this day his welfare is my care.
This man, Admetus, I have even now
Rescued from death: having deceived the Fates
To grant me, that if other can be found
To die instead, Admetus may live on.
This knowing, and the circle of his friends
Beseeching, none is found among them all,
Not his grey mother, nor his aged sire,
None,—save HIS WIFE ALONE, willing to die,
And leave the light of heaven that he may live.
She at this moment, fainting in his arms,
Is near her end: this is her fated day.
Now let me stand aside, lest I incur
Pollution from the dead: for here I see
Death, the highpriest of the infernal gods,
Coming to fetch from earth his yielded prey:
Well hath he guarded the appointed day.

Enter Death.

Death. Out and alas!
What makest thou, Apollo,
About these walls? why tarriest thou
Near to the palace? are the gods
Who rule the dead, a second time
To be defrauded of their rights?
And did it not suffice that thou
Shouldst have deprived them of Admetus,
Cheating the fates by craft, but now
Again thou keepest armed watch
Over the queen, who hath devoted
Herself, to save her lord from death?

* Better known as Æsculapius.

Apollo. Fear not: for I am just, and mean no ill.
Death. If just, what need to carry this thy bow?
Apollo. It is my practice, thus to arm myself.
Death. Yea, and to give this house unjust assistance.
Apollo. I sorrow with the sorrows of my friend.
Death. Wilt thou then steal from me this second victim?
Apollo. No plundering hand deprived thee of the first.
Death. How then doth he still live, and hath not died?
Apollo. By yielding her, for whom thou now art come.
Death. True, and will bear her down below the earth.
Apollo. Take her, and go: thou wilt not be advised.—
Death. Advised, to kill her? 'tis the end I came for.
Apollo. No, but to strike those who await thy stroke.
Death. I catch thy meaning, and thy wish is clear.
Apollo. May then Alcestis live, and reach old age?
Death. She may not: I too, love to have my way.
Apollo. Take whom thou wilt, only *one* life is thine.
Death. Yes, but the death o' th' young brings me more glory
Apollo. Well—and if she die old, her burial's rich.
Death. Ha, ha! you are no friend to heirs, I see.
Apollo. What sayest? is ev'n Death become a sophist?
Death. Let those who *may* die old, rejoice in it.
Apollo. You will not then this favour grant to me.
Death. No, truly: you should know my ways too well.
Apollo. I know that gods and men alike detest them.
Death. Thou canst not have all things in spite of justice.
Apollo. There is shall conquer thee, fierce as thou art.
A hero is e'en now approaching hither,
To fetch Eurystheus, from the wintry clime
Of Thrace, the steeds he coveteth, who, lodged
Beneath this roof, shall wrench from thee thy victim:
And then thou wilt deserve no thanks from me,
But yielding my request, be hated still.
Death. Thou talkest much, but gainest none the more;
This woman passes to the realms below.
Even now I go for her, and will begin
The sacrifice with this my sword: for he
Is the devoted to the gods beneath,
Whose locks of severed hair this blade hath hallowed.
[*Exeunt.*

Enter the Chorus singing mournfully in parts.

1st part. Why is all hushed within?
Why is deep silence reigning
Through Admetus' house?
2nd part. No friend is near, to tell,
Whether 'tis ours to mourn
Our queen as dead, or she,
The flower of loving wives,
Yet sees the light of day.
1st part. Hear ye sad groans within,
Or blows of anguished hands,
As after death are heard?
2nd part. No, nor doth any come
Forth from the palace gates:
Oh that thou wouldst appear
Thou god of healing power,
To turn the tide of woe!
1st part. There would not be this hush
If she were gone: she is not yet
Departed from their sight.
2nd part. Nor doth any urn appear
Of pure water, as is wont,
At the gates where lie the dead:
Nor the locks in mourning shorn
Lie before the palace door:
Nor the female hands resound
Wringing for untimely death.
1st part. Yet this is the fated day,—
2nd part. Why remind us of our grief?
1st part. When she must depart beneath.
2nd part. You have touched the springs of woe.

Chorus. But see, a servant from the house approaching,
Weeping sad tears: what tidings shall we hear?
To weep when misery happens to our masters,
Is pardonable weakness:—hath the queen
Yielded her breath, or is she yet alive?
Servant. Both dead and living ye may reckon her.
Chorus. How can the same be living and be dead?
Servant. Already faint and gasping she is laid.
Chorus. O wretched king! how good a pair are parted!
Servant. He will not know her worth till he have lost her.

Chorus. Is there no hope her life may yet be saved?
Servant. No, for the fated day hurries her off.
Chorus. Are the accustomed rites prepared for her?
Servant. Yea, and the dress in which she shall be buried.
Chorus. Let her know then, her death is glorious,
And she the noblest of all mortal wives.
Servant. Who will oppose her claim? how bright must be
That wife in virtue, who shall her excel!
What stronger proof of service to her lord,
Than for his safety to lay down her life?
Throughout the city this her deed is known:
But marvel now at what she did within.
When she was 'ware the fated day was come,
She laved her snowy limbs in fountain water,
Then from their cedar chests her choicest robes
She took, and being carefully arrayed,
Standing before the hearth, she prayed, and said:
'Goddess,—for I am passing to the shades,—
Receive my last prostration, my last prayer;
Take up my motherless children: and appoint
A loving consort for my son; a husband
Of birth and valour for my orphan'd girl.
Let not my children die, like me their mother,
Untimely, but in high prosperity
Fulfil at home a life of peace and joy.'
This said, she sought the altars in the palace,
And crowned them, and renewed her parting prayers,
Stripping the scented leaves from myrtle boughs;
No tear she shed, no murmuring sigh she heaved;
Nor did the coming evil blanch her cheek.
Then, entering in her chamber, and her bed,
At length she wept, and uttered a sad speech:
'O couch, where I resigned my virgin charms
To him for whom I die,—farewell, and prosper:
I blame not thee:—one victim thou hast slain,
One only: for my faith to him and thee
Has brought me to my death. Some other wife
Shall share thee with him, not more chaste than I,
But blessed, it may be, with a happier fate.'
Then falling on the bed she kissed it oft,
And bathed it with abundant floods of tears.
When she had wept full long, she rose, and often

Before she left the chamber, turned again,
And cast herself afresh upon the couch.
Meanwhile her children hung upon her robes,
And wept; now one, and now the other taking,
She clasped and kissed them, as it were the last.
We servants all shed tears—which she perceiving,
Gave each her hand—none of us was too mean
For her to bid farewell, and hear it bid.
Such are the sorrows in Admetus' house:—
If he had died, his course would have been run;
But by escape from death he hath entailed
On all his future years unceasing woe.

Chorus. Surely he bears his part of tears and sighs,
Being about to lose so good a wife.

Servant. Yea, and he fondly holds her in his arms,
Praying her not to leave him—but his prayer
May not be heard, for she is wasting fast,
And faints between his arms, a drooping weight.
Still, though she hath but slender hold of life,
She loves to look upon the sun's bright light,
Saying that she shall ne'er behold it more.
But I will go, and give note of your presence:
Not all so loyal are to those in power,
As to draw near and solace their misfortunes;
But of long years your friendship hath been tried.

Chorus. O thou who rulest earth and heaven,
Can no escape be given
From this sad fate? or must we shear
Our votive hair,
And the dark robes of sorrow wear?
Alas! it is too clear:
Yet on the gods above we call;
Their might can order all.

Thou king Apollo, find some way
For our sad prince this day—
Be thou his friend—in former years
Thou didst dry up the tears
Which in this palace flowed: and now
His bright deliverer be Thou.

But see they come—the dying wife
And her sad husband—mourn, O land,

Thy queen, the best of queens, thus snatched
Untimely to her grave.

Enter ADMETUS *supporting* ALCESTIS—*with them their two children.*

Alcestis. Oh sun! oh light of day!
Oh heavenly courses of the fleeting clouds!
Admetus. They look on thee and me, two wretched ones,
Nought erring against Heaven to cause thy death.
Alcestis. Oh earth! oh palace halls,
My happy childhood's home, my bridal chambers!
Admetus. Look up, poor victim—do not leave me thus:
Pray the almighty gods to pity thee.
Alcestis. I see, I see the two-oared bark—
Th' infernal ferryman is calling,
His hand upon the pole—'Why tarriest?
Be speedy—thou art hindering our passage.'
Admetus. Oh bitter, bitter voyage! woe, woe, woe!
Alcestis. One draws me with him—see you not?
A winged messenger of hell,
Dark scowling under withering glances,—
Ah! loose me! down what dismal road
Wouldst thou be dragging me?
Admetus. Dismal indeed, to all that love thee—most
Of all, to me and to our children.
Alcestis. There—hold me up no longer—lay me down:
I have no strength to stand—death is not far—
A dark mist creeps upon my field of sight.
O children, children, ye have now no mother!
Live on, dear children, bright and happy lives!
Admetus. Ah me! this farewell hath a dismal sound,
Sadder than death itself—oh, leave me not!
By these thy children I conjure thee, whom
Thou wilt bereave—lift up thine eyes—
I can no longer live when thou art gone—
With thee it rests to save us or to kill,
For love is stronger than the cords of life.
Alcestis. Admetus,—for how 'tis with me thou seest,
Receive my last commands before I die.
Thee I have honoured—thee preferred, that thou
Shouldest live on, while uncompelled I die
On thy behalf.—I might have staid in life
And wedded whom I would, and reigned in state,
But that I counted it no worthy life

To live deprived of thee, with these poor orphans;
Nor have I spared my beauty nor my youth,
Nor all the fond delights of this my prime.
Thy father and thy mother have betrayed thee,
When it became them well to leave this earth,
And saving thee would glorify their end.
For thou wert all they had: nor was there hope,
When thou wert dead, of other issue from them.
Then could I still have lived, and thou; nor then
Wouldst thou have wept my loss, and these thy babes
Reared up in dreary orphanhood—but God
Hath ordered it, that so it should not be.
Well, be it so—only forget not this
My self devotion—equal sacrifice
I cannot ask thee—for nought is dear as life—
But what I ask is just, thou wilt confess:—
These children, if thou hast a father's heart,
Thou lovest, as I love: permit them then
To rise in life the masters of this house,
And graft not over them a step-mother,
Who with unkindly jealousy, may lay
A heavy hand on these our mutual pledges.
Not thus remember me, I do conjure thee—
For such an one is ever ill in love
To former children—yea a very serpent:
My boy hath thee, his father, as a tower,—
But thou, poor girl, how shall thy maiden years
Be spent with fit repute? how wilt thou find
Thy father's second consort act to thee?
Well if she strike thee not with slander's tooth,
And crush thy fairest prospects in their bud;
For thou wilt have no mother to betroth thee,
None, to stand by and soothe thy childbed pangs,
Then, when a mother's presence is most precious.
For I must die—and this, not with a respite
Of one nor two days;—in a few short moments,
I shall be reckoned one of the departed.
Farewell then and be happy: thou, Admetus,
Boast of my wifely virtue: ye, my children,
Cherish the memory of the best of mothers.

Chorus. Fear not: my faith I give on his behalf;
He will obey thy wish, if he be wise.

Admetus. Comfort thyself; it shall be thus, even thus:
Thou hast been mine in life, and now in death
None but thyself shall ever be my bride.
None is so noble, none so fair, as thou.
Name not our children more: I pray the gods
To give me joy of them,—more than of thee.
This mourning will I hold, not for one year,
But while my life shall last: and I will hate
Father and mother for thy sake, for they
Were friends in name, no further—while thou gavest
Thine own dear life to rescue me from death.
Should I not mourn, deprived of such a partner?
All revels and all merriment shall cease,
All garlands, and all song, throughout this house.
For I will touch the merry lute no more,
Nor sing to Libyan pipe; all my delight
Is gone, when thou art fled. Some artist hand
Shall frame thy statue, which with vain regrets
I will enfold, embracing, and thy name
Call over it, and, in wild fancy's dreams,
Seem to possess thee, when I have thee not.
Cold comfort this, I know, but it will help
To ease my load of grief:—and in my dreams
Visiting me, thou may'st rejoice my heart.
For sight of those we love, however short,
Delights us.—
Had I but the voice and song
Of Orpheus, that I might the dark queen charm
Who reigns below, or her unpitying lord,
And gain thee from their hands, I would descend
On the glad errand: not the infernal hound,
Nor the grim Charon with his freight of ghosts,
Should stay me, till I brought thee up to life.
This may not be—but there await my coming,
When I shall die, and make my dwelling ready:
For we will dwell together—I will order
My limbs to be composed beside thine own:
For never, even in death, may I be parted
From thee, in life my only faithful friend!

Chorus. Thy grief for her, for she is worthy of it,
I, as a friend with friend, will bear with thee.

Alcestis. My children, ye have heard your father say

That he will wed no wife but me alone,
To rule o'er you, and blot my love away.

Admetus. Yea, and again I say it—and will do so.

Alcestis. Receive then these my children from my hand.

Admetus. The giver and the gift alike are dear.

Alcestis. Be thou their mother in their lack of me.

Admetus. Nature will claim it of me, when thou'rt gone.

Alcestis. Children, my life is setting at its noon.

Admetus. Alas, what more am I, deprived of thee?

Alcestis. Time will relax thy grief,—the dead are nought.

Admetus. Take me with thee—ah, what a loss is mine!

Alcestis. Even now mine eyes are weighed upon with darkness.

Admetus. I perish, if thou leavest me alone.

Alcestis. Speak of me as one dead, my time is come.

Admetus. Look up again—leave not thy children thus.

Alcestis. Heaven knows, against my will! farewell, dear children!

Admetus. Look on them once again.

Alcestis. I am not able—

Admetus. Ah! art thou going from us?

Alcestis. Fare ye well.

[*Dies.*

Chorus. The last is over now—thy wife is dead.

Eumelus. Woe, woe is me!
My father, she is dead!
And we are orphans!
See, see her soulless eyes—
See, see her lifeless hands!
Answer, dear mother, answer!
Your own, your child is calling,
His lips to thine—oh, speak!

Admetus. She hears thee not, nor sees—alas! my children,
We three must bear a heavy load of grief!

Eumelus. And thou, my sister, too,
Must mourn our common loss:
Both in our helpless youth
Left in the world alone
With no fond mother near—
Of no avail, my father,
Have been thy marriage ties—
With her, thine house hath died.

Chorus. Admetus, these are woes that must be borne;
Not first nor last of men has thou been reft
Of a dear wife—we all must bow to death.

Admetus. I know it: nor did this come suddenly,
I knew, and mourned in prospect long ago.
But now, for I will go and set in order
The matters that pertain to her interment,—
Remain ye here, and chant responsive hymns
To the inexorable god below.
And to all Thessaly do I proclaim,
To mourn for her, and shear sepulchral locks,
And wear the robes of woe; and all who ride
In chariots, lop your coursers' flowing manes;
And let not pipe nor lute throughout the city
Sound by the space of twelve revolving moons.
For never shall I bury one more dear,
Nor who has loved me more; for she alone
Hath died for me: therefore I honour her.

The corpse is borne out. Exeunt Admetus, children, and attendants. The Chorus sing a song setting forth the virtues of Alcestis, and how she shall be celebrated, in that she hath died for her husband when none else would, not even his aged parents; and pray that they may have such wives, but not lose them thus.

Here we will pause awhile, and call upon the reader to notice the entirely different character of the poetic power of Euripides from that of his two great contemporaries. There is here no interest summoned from the depths of human passion—no iron chain of family destiny—no superhuman sufferings—the very gods who appear in the play are levelled to human capacities, and endowed with human feelings. We shall presently see this more plainly still, in the passages which follow. But we have been sitting at ease long enough: see, the chorus have finished their song, and our fellow Athenians are all attention. What can happen to interest us, in this desolation and woe? A heavy step is heard from the side scenes—who can this be, with his strange dress and his club?

Enter Hercules.

Hercules. Friends, my good fellows of the land of Pheræ,
Say, shall I find Admetus in the palace?

Chorus. The son of Pheres is within: but tell us,
What errand brings thee into Thessaly!
Hercules. I have in hand a labour for Eurystheus.
Chorus. Where goest thou, and to accomplish what?
Hercules. To fetch the horses of the Thracian king.
Chorus. How may that be—know'st thou the stranger chief?
Hercules. No: I was never in the land of Thrace.
Chorus. Thou wilt not get the steeds without a struggle.
Hercules. Be't so: I could but undertake the task.
Chorus. Thou wilt return then victor, or be slain.
Hercules. This conflict will not be the first I've tried.
Chorus. And when the king is killed, what art thou better?
Hercules. I take the horses back, as I am bidden.
Chorus. But 'tis no easy thing to bridle them.
Hercules. Surely, unless indeed they breathe forth fire.
Chorus. But they tear men in sunder with their jaws.
Hercules. You speak of mountain wolves, and not of horses.
Chorus. Their mangers you will see besmeared with blood.
Hercules. And whom has he that bred them for his sire?
Chorus. Arès,*—and he is king of golden Thrace.
Hercules. This is a task then which beseems my fate,—
For it is ever pressing harder on me,—
If I must always fight with sons of Arès;—
Lyceon first I fought, then Cycnus, now
A third awaits me, and his horses too.
Still there is no man who shall ever see
Alcmena's son from any foe retreat.
Chorus. Behold the king Admetus coming forth.

Enter Admetus.

Admetus. Hail, son of Zeus, by royal Perseus' line!
Hercules. All joy, Admetus, king of Thessaly!
Admetus. Would it were joy! but thou wilt feel for me.
Hercules. How now? what means this lock in mourning shorn?
Admetus. I have a funeral in hand to-day.
Hercules. Ah me! heaven grant your children be all well!
Admetus. My children are all living in the palace.
Hercules Your *father's* time was come, if he be dead.
Admetus. No, he is living, and my mother too.
Hercules. Surely your wife Alcestis is not dead?

* Mars, the god of war.

Admetus. A twofold history, I may say, is her's. *

Hercules. But is she dead or living? tell me that.

Admetus. She is, and is not, and she grieveth me.

Hercules. I know no more—you speak unmeaning words.

Admetus. Knew you not what she undertook to do?

Hercules. Yea, she engaged to die on your behalf.

Admetus. How then is she alive, if thus foredoomed?

Hercules. Pooh! mourn her not—it will be time hereafter.

Admetus. The doomed is good as dead, the dead is gone.

Hercules. Still to be dead, or not, hath difference.

Admetus. That is your judgment: mine is otherwise.

Hercules. Why weepest thou? who of thy friends is dead?

Admetus. A woman: 'twas a woman that we spoke of. †

Hercules. One not akin to thee, or of thy blood?

Admetus. Not of my blood, but otherwise allied.

Hercules. How then did she in this thy house depart?

Admetus. She lost her father, and took refuge here.

Hercules. Alas!
Would I had found thee otherwise than mourning!

Admetus. Whither doth this thine exclamation tend?

Hercules. Why, now I must go seek some other host.

Admetus. That may not be, let not such shame befall.

Hercules. A guest is troublesome to those in mourning.

Admetus. They who are dead, are dead. Come, pass within.

Hercules. 'Tis shame to eat and drink with weeping men.

Admetus. My guestchambers are separate: thither go.

Hercules. No: let me forward, and I'll thank thee much.

Admetus. It cannot be that thou shouldst seek elsewhere
The lodging I can give thee: do thou lead,

[*To a Servant.*]

Open the guestchambers, and to those whose duty
Is to attend them, bid, to set on food
In plenty, and shut up the middle doors:
It is not decent that the entertainment
Of guests should be defiled by sound of mourning.

[*Hercules enters, preceded by a Servant.*]

Chorus. What hast thou done, Admetus? when such woe
Presses upon us, wouldst thou take in guests?

* Admetus dare not tell Hercules the extent of his misfortune, in fear that hearing it he may turn away and seek entertainment elsewhere.

† The Greek word γυνὴ means both *woman* and *wife*: whence the ambiguity.

Admetus. Wouldst thou have blamed me less, if I had driven
My friend out of my palace and my city?
Then would my own bereavement be no lighter,
And I should be inhospitable held.
This stranger is the best of friends to me,
Whene'er I visit Argos' thirsty land.

Chorus. Why then didst thou conceal thy present loss,
If this man is thy friend, as thou aver'st?

Admetus. He ne'er would have set foot within my house,
Had he but known my real calamity.
And yet he will not praise me for my guile:
But 'tis consistent with my house's custom
Never to turn back nor dishonour guests.

Chorus. House! which fate hath alway given
To the liberal and the good,
Under thee a Son of Heaven
Bright Apollo once abode:
Nor did he disdain to keep
In thy fields the folded sheep,
O'er the hills and shrubby rocks
Piping to the straying flocks.

Touched with heavenly music's power,
Came the spotted lynxes then,
Lions grim, from brake and bower,
Charmed, forsook their mountain den:
And the fawn with skip and glance,
Round thy lute was seen to dance,
Bounding through the trunks of pine,
To enjoy the sound divine.

Therefore, house, thou boastest now
Thine abundance, and thy dwelling
Hast where Bœbè's waters flow
From their crystal fountains welling,
Westward, the Molossian land
Bounds thy ploughed and pastured strand,
All the East, thou rulest o'er
Far as the Ægean shore.

Now thy master opening wide
Hospitable door, receives

His great guest: but sorrow's tide
Flows from him: he inly grieves
For his new-departed wife,
But his honour wins the strife:—
Hopeful, we can scarce forebode
Aught but weal for one so good.

Enter Admetus with attendants, bearing the corpse.

Admetus. Friendly assemblage of Pheræans, now
This corpse is being borne, all rites accomplished,
To the sad tomb and to the funeral pyre:
Speak to the dead, as it is customary,
Now she is going forth her latest journey. *

Chorus. Thou who hast dread danger dared,
Nor thy happy life hast spared,
Best of women, fare thee well!
If after death the pious fare
Happier than others, be thy share
Brightest crown of bliss to wear!
'Mongst the highly favoured there,
Blessed, blessed, may'st thou dwell!

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter the Servant appointed to wait on Hercules.

Servant. Well, I have waited on full many strangers
Who from all parts have sought Admetus' house,
And given them to eat—but never yet
Received I worse guest than this present one.
Wretch, who first saw my master deep in woe,
And then dared enter—and next, having entered,
He did not modestly take what was offered,
Knowing our grief: but if we brought not aught,
He chid and bid us bring it; then, upholding
An ivied goblet, drank of the dark liquor,
Till the wine's flame, within him mounting, fired
His brain: then crowning him with myrtle, brawled
Strains unmelodious: so there were two sounds;
He, singing, and not caring for the grief

* Here follows a long and angry discourse between Admetus and his father, who accuses him of being his wife's murderer, and not having courage to die, and is in turn reproached for not dying for his son. I have ventured to omit it.

Prevailing in the house; and we, lamenting
Our poor lost mistress: for we dared not shew
Our wet eyes to the stranger: 'twas our orders.
And now I have to feast this wretch within,
Doubtless some arrant knave or wandering thief:
While she is carried forth, unseen of me,
Unhailed, unhonoured, who to me, and all
Her servants, was a mother, softening down
Her husband's anger. Hate I not this stranger
Most justly, for intruding on our woes?

Hercules. You there!—why look so sullen and so grand?
Servants should not present sour visages
Unto their guests, but should receive them affably.
But you, beholding here your master's friend,
Receive him with morose and wrinkled brow,
Because forsooth some neighbour hath departed.
Sirrah, come here. and I will teach thee wisdom.
Know'st thou not mortal matters how they stand?
No—how shouldst thou know anything? then learn.
To die, 's a debt that all mankind must pay,
And there is none among them that doth know,
Whether he shall but live the morrow through;
For fortune's game is doubtful in its issue,
Nor can one learn, nor master it by art.
Now then that thou hast learnt thus much from me,
Enjoy thyself, drink deep, count to-day's life
Thine own, and all beyond commit to chance.
But, above all, the kindest of the gods,
Fair Venus, honour thou. All other things
Leave to their fate, and yield to my advice;
Let thy huge grief alone, and enter in,
And crown thyself with flowers, and drink with me;
I'll warrant thee, the wine-stream's joyous sound
Filling the cup, shall soon relax thy brow.
Being mortals, we should feel as mortals ought;
For to the sullen and sour-visaged crew
Life is not life, I hold, but misery.

Servant. All this we know—but now we're suffering
Woes which admit not of such joyous treatment.

Hercules. How so? she was a neighbour that is dead;
The rulers of this house yet live and prosper.

Servant. How, live and prosper? thou know'st not our grief.

Hercules. Yea, but I do, unless thy lord deceived me.
Servant. He is but too too friendly to his guests.
Hercules. Should he have stinted me, for a neighbour's death?
Servant. Ah! what a neighbour! one within our doors.
Hercules. Is there then some mischance he did not mention?
Servant. Enjoy thyself—our master's woes are ours.
Hercules. These last words speak not sorrow for a stranger.
Servant. No, or I should not have disturbed thy mirth.
Hercules. Have I been then deluded by mine host?
Servant. Thou camest in an hour when 'twas not fitting
This palace should receive thee: and thou saw'st
Our grief, our shorn hair and our mourning garb.
Hercules. Who is the dead? Is any of his children
Departed—hath his aged father died?
Servant. Ah! more than this! his wife is dead, O stranger.
Hercules. What sayest thou? and ye have entertained me.
Servant. Yes, for he feared to turn thee from his house.
Hercules. O, my poor friend, how great has been thy loss!
Servant. We all have perished, not our queen alone.
Hercules. I guessed at something wrong, when I perceived
His weeping eyes, his locks of severed hair,
His melancholy looks: but he assured me
'Twas but a neighbour he was mourning thus.
And, 'spite my better judgment, I came in,
I drank within the house of this kind host,
When he was wrapt in grief,—I revelled there,
And crowned my head with flowers. But tell me now,
Such deep misfortune being on the house,
Where doth he lay her? where may he be found?
Servant. Beside the road that to Larissa leads,
Just past the suburbs you will see the tomb.
Hercules. O much enduring heart! O soul of mine!
Now must thou shew, what progeny was born
Of queen Alcmena to the King of Heaven. *
Now must I save this woman lately dead,
And set her living in this house again.
I will lay wait, and watch Death's black rob'd King,
Where I am sure to find him, drinking blood
From the slain victims, near the recent tomb.
Then from mine ambush issuing, if I seize him,

* Alcmena was mother of Hercules by Zeus.

And fold him in mine arms, there is not one
Who can unwind him from my painful pressure,
Till he hath given me the woman back.
But if I miss my aim, and he not come
To taste the bloody offerings, I will go
The downward road, into the sunless halls
Of the dark Queen below, and there will plead;—
And, (for my pleading shall prevail) will bring
Alcestis, and restore her to her husband;
Who hath received me, being in deep grief,
And not refused me hospitable gifts,
But in his generous nature, hid from me
His cause of mourning. Who in Thessaly
Can be a worthier host? who in all Greece?
Wherefore, himself thus noble, he shall never
Find me a friend unworthy of his love.

[*Exit.*]

Enter Admetus and train, returning from the burial.

Admetus. O sad heart-sickening aspect
Of my widowed house!
What home is left for me?
Whither can I betake myself,
To what woe first give vent?
I have no pleasure now
In the bright light of the sun,
I have no pleasure now
In my once joyous home:
I envy the departed—
Would I were one of them!
I envy those who never
Tasted the marriage state,
And childless live: they have
One soul alone to grieve for;
'Tis more than I can bear
To see my children's tears,
And my dear bridal couch
All widowed and forlorn,
When happy and alone
I might have spent my days.
Alas! why kept ye me

From joining her I love
In the deep tomb, and there
Beside that perfect piece
Of wifely virtue, lying?

Chorus. Thy woe is huge indeed,
But thy complaints help not
The dead; nor first of men
Hast thou the loss deplored
Of a wife chaste and good.
I had a friend by blood,
Whose only child was taken,
A boy well worth his tears:—
But the old man bore up
Under the load of grief,
Greyhaired, and verging to the grave.

Admetus. O well known shape and seeming
Of mine own home! How shall I pass
Thy doors—how dwell in thee,
Now that my lot is changed?
Alas! the difference to me!
Formerly, with glad torches,
And happy wedding songs,
I entered thee, and holding
The hand of her I loved—
The joyous multitude
Following with shout and song,
In loudest gratulations
Of her and me, proclaiming
That we had brought together
Two streams of princely blood;—
But now, sad counterpart
Of those glad sounds, the threne
Of hopeless woe is uttered,
And the dark robes of mourning
Form my procession thither,
To my sad widowed couch.

Chorus. Thy fortune hath been blest,
And thou untried in grief,
Therefore this stroke hath come
With stronger anguish fraught:
But thou hast saved thy life,
And livest by her death.

Admetus. Friends, I esteem the lot of my lost partner
More blest than mine, although it seem not so:
For upon her no grief shall ever light,—
With glory hath she ceased from all her labours:—
But I, when it my duty was to die,
My fate o'erpassing, shall but lead a life
Of dreary sorrow: I perceive it now.
How can I bear to enter this my house?
Whom hailing, or by whom addressed, can I
Meet kind reception? Whither shall I turn?—
Within, the desolation drives me out,
Seeing her well-known haunts deserted all,
Her couch, her seat—and missing her nice care
Of all things there: my children too will fall
About my knees, and weep: my servants moan
For their lost mistress, and her virtues praise.
Such are my woes within;—from public life
The sight of others' wedded bliss will drive me,
And woman's voice, oft heard: for I can never
Endure to see the mates of my lost wife.
And all mine enemies will point, and say:
'See the base man who did not dare to die,
'But, his own spouse betraying, by his baseness
'Escaped from death—hath he the heart of man?
'And hates his parents, who on his behalf
'Refused to die,—himself the courage lacking.'
Such ill report will to my griefs be added:
How then am I the better for my life,
Both ill at ease, and ill reported also?

Chorus. I too have been borne along
Through the airy realms of song.
I have searched historic page
Full of truths of every age:—
But no fetter can I find
Able Fate's strong course to bind:
Neither in the Thracian verse
Which sage Orpheus did rehearse,
Nor in what drugs, strong to save,
Phœbus to Asclepius gave.
Of the immortals only one,
Image hath she not, nor throne,
Sacrifices loves she none:

O revered in strength and state
Press not on me, mighty Fate,
With a power of woe too great!
E'en the sire of men and gods,
After thy stern pleasure nods:
E'en the edge of tempered steel
Shall thy prouder temper feel:
Nor doth thy cruel spirit know
Compassion for our human woe.

Thee, Admetus, in the bands
Of her stern unyielding hands,
Hath she taken: but resign
To her thy life—it is not thine
By thy weeping to restore
Those who look on light no more.
Even the bright sons of Heaven
To dimness and to death are given.
She was loved when she was here,
In death too we hold her dear;
Let not her hallowed tomb be past
As where the common dead are cast;
Let her have honour with the blest
Who dwell above; her place of rest
When the traveller passeth by,
Let him say—'Within doth lie
She who dared for love to die.
Thou who now in bliss dost dwell,
Hail, blest soul! and speed us well.'

But here, as seemeth me, Alcmena's son
Is to thy palace hearth approaching near.

Enter Hercules, leading a woman veiled.

Hercules. One may speak freely to a friend, Admetus,
And not retain offence within one's bosom:—
I, then, had claim to be considered worthy
To know, and bear a part in these thy griefs:
But thou didst hide from me Alcestis' death,
And entertainedst me within thy house,
As if all this were for a neighbour's loss.
And I have crowned my head, and poured libations,
In thy sad dwelling. Trust me, I do blame thee:

Yea, to thy charge I lay it, that I did this:—
But I will cease, nor add rebuke to grief.
But why I came, returning from my course,
Was thus:—I beg of thee to take and keep
For me this woman, while I go and bring
The Thracian horses, having killed their master;
And if aught ill should chance, (which heaven avert)
Retain her as thy servant. With much toil
She came into my hands:—at certain games
Which I fell in with, she was the chief prize;
And I (for base I held it to decline
Such contest) strove, and won her. But, again,
Take her, and keep her: ere long time hath past,
Thou wilt commend me.

Admetus. Not as dishonouring thee, or holding thee
Among the base did I conceal from thee
My wife's sad fortune: but grief unto grief
Would have been added, had I suffered thee
To seek another host: and grief was here
Sufficient. For this woman, I beseech thee
Some other put in charge with her, whose lot
Hath not been sad as mine, (many there are
In Pheræ) nor remind me of my woes.
For I could not, beholding her, be free
From constant tears: add not to one heart-sick
Fresh cause of anguish: I have load enough.
Moreover, where should such a woman dwell,
Young as she is? for by her gait and garment
She should be young;—should it be with the men?
How could she then escape pollution's touch?
We cannot curb the young: I speak, my friend,
As pleading thine own cause. Shall she inhabit
The chamber of my lost one? how can I
A stranger introduce there? for I fear
Two-fold reproach—one from the people here,
Who will accuse me, having her betrayed
Who died for me, of taking a new wife;
And from the dead, for she hath ample claim
To be remembered, and her memory honoured.
But, woman, whosoè'er thou art, know this,
Thy stature and thy gait doth much resemble
My lost Alcestis—woe is me—remove

This woman from my sight, lest she entrap me:
For I could think I see my very wife,
Looking on her: it doth stir up my heart,
And fill mine eyes with tears: ah wretched me!
How deep the bitter of this draught doth reach!

Chorus. Thou art not prospering: but it behoves,
However suffering, not to send her from thee;—
Take this deposit from the son of Jove.

Hercules. Would that I had such power, as to bring back
Thy wife into the light, from the dark realms
Below, and shew thee this surpassing favour!

Admetus. I know thou willest it—but to what end?
The dead can never see the light again.

Hercules. Be reasonable in thy grief, Admetus.

Admetus. 'Tis easier to advise than to endure.

Hercules. What profit will it be, always to mourn?

Admetus. None, I know well: but my desire impeaches
My knowledge, and persuades me to lament.

Hercules. Love of the dead is that which starts thy tears.

Admetus. Oh, I am lost with her, beyond all utterance!

Hercules. A faithful wife thou beyond doubt hast lost.

Admetus. Yea, so that life no more is joy to me.

Hercules. Time will wear out the anguish, now so strong.

Admetus. Yea it is true: but death will be the time.

Hercules. A bride will staunch it, and another's love.

Admetus. Be silent, speak not thus! for this I looked not.

Hercules. What, will you be a widower all your life?

Admetus. No other wife shall ever lie beside me.

Hercules. Will this be any profit to the dead?

Admetus. Nay: but where'er she is, she shall be honoured.

Hercules. 'Tis well, 'tis well: but you'll be charged with folly.

Admetus. Thou never shalt call me a bridegroom more.

Hercules. I do commend thee for thy constant love.

Admetus. Then may I die, whene'er I shall betray her,
Though she be nothing.

Hercules. Take, I beg of thee,
This woman, and admit her to thine home.

Admetus. Nay, ask me not, by Zeus that did beget thee.

Hercules. Thou wilt err grievously not doing this.

Admetus. And, if I do it, grief will rend my heart.

Hercules. Be ruled—compliance may turn out your gain.

Admetus. O that thou never hadst obtained this prize!

Hercules. Now that I have, thou also hast o'ercome.
Admetus. Have I? then let this woman be removed.
Hercules. Yes, if she must—but art thou doing right?
Admetus. I am—unless indeed thine ire be roused.
Hercules. I am thus eager, knowing more than thou.
Admetus. Well, have thy way: but not my will consents.
Hercules. Hereafter thou wilt praise me; only yield.
Admetus. Take her within, if she must enter there.
Hereules. I will not loose her for thy slaves to take her.
Admetus. Take her within then, if thou wilt, thyself.
Hercules. Nay, I will place her in thine hands alone.
Admetus. I will not touch her—she may enter in.
Hercules. Thine hand alone will I entrust with her.
Admetus. Force me not, I beseech thee, to do this.
Hercules. Take courage: reach thine hand and touch the stranger.
Admetus. As to a deadly Gorgon, I extend it.
Hercules. Thou hast her?
Admetus. Yea.
Hercules. Now keep her, and confess
The son of Zeus is no ungrateful guest.
Look now upon her, *(unveiling her)* if she seem to thee
Like thy departed wife—and change from mourning
Into great joy.
Admetus. Oh heavens! what do I see!
A sudden and unlooked for miracle!
I see indeed my very wife again.
Or doth some scornful vision from the gods,
Delude me into joy?
Hercules. This is no vision:
It is thy wife indeed.
Admetus. Take heed it be no phantom from the shades.
Hercules. I am no guider up and down of ghosts.
Admetus. Do I then see my wife whom I have buried?
Hercules. The same: distrust thy happiness no longer.
Admetus. May I but touch and speak to her as living?
Hercules. Speak to her: thou hast all thy soul did wish.
Admetus. O sight and person of my dearest wife,
Unlooked for I possess thee—for my hopes
Reached not to this.
Hercules. Thou hast her: may no grudge
From the high Heaven be on thee!
Admetus. O thou illustrious son of greatest Zeus,

Blessed be thou, and may thy Sire divine
Have thee in his high keeping! thou alone
Hast raised me up again. But tell me how
Thou hast procured her rescue from the grave?

Hercules. By joining fight with the dark king of death.

Admetus. Where did this struggle happen?

Hercules. By the tomb
I seized him in my hands and bore her off.

Admetus. Why doth she stand so long bereft of speech?

Hercules. She may not speak to thee, till all be done
In order due to appease the gods below,
And the third morning from this present, come.
Take her within: and as thou hast begun,
Continue to be generous to thy guests.
And now farewell: I go, my bidden labour
To finish, for the son of Sthenelus.

Admetus. Tarry with us, and be our guest awhile.

Hercules. Some time hereafter—now I must use haste.

Admetus. Good luck go with thee! and return victorious!

[*Exit Hercules.*]

To all my people I do now proclaim
To raise the dance at this my blessed fortune,
And load the altars with glad sacrifice.
For we have changed our former evil lot:
And thankfully confess our boundless joy.

Chorus. Manifold are the changes
Which Providence may bring:
Many unhoped for things
God's power hath brought about:
What seemeth, often happeneth not,
And for unlikely things
God findeth out a way:
Thus hath this matter been.

[*Exeunt.*]

Presuming our readers to be weary of the length of this play and chapter, we will add no further remarks; but will subjoin two poems on the subject of the drama, from the loftiest of our poets, and the sweetest of our poetesses.

The first of these is Milton's beautiful sonnet—and we are

willing to appeal to any of our readers, after our Chapter on the Alcestis, against Dr. Johnson's judgement: *

ON HIS DECEASED WIFE.

METHOUGHT I saw my late espousèd saint
Brought to me, like Alcestis, from the grave:
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
Rescued from death by force, though pale and faint.
Mine, as whom wash'd from spot of childhood taint.
Purification in the old law did save,
And such, as yet once more I trust to have
Full sight of her in heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind:
Her face was veil'd: yet to my fancied sight
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
But O! as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked; she fled; and day brought back my night.

The other is from the sweetest of our English poetesses: need we write, after saying this, Felicia Hemans!

THE DEATH-SONG OF ALCESTIS.

SHE came forth in her bridal robes arrayed,
And 'midst the graceful statues, round the hall
Shedding the calm of their celestial mien,
Stood pale, yet proudly beautiful, as they:
Flowers in her bosom, and the star-like gleam
Of jewels trembling from her braided hair,
And *death* upon her brow!—but glorious death!
Her own heart's choice, the token and the seal
Of love, o'ermastering love; which, till that hour,
Almost an anguish in the brooding weight
Of its unutterable tenderness,
Had burden'd her full soul. But now, oh! now,
Its time was come—and from the spirit's depths,
The passion and the mighty melody

* 'He lost his wife ..... and he has honoured her memory with *a poor sonnet*. (!)'—*Lives of the Poets*.

Of its immortal voice, in triumph broke,
Like a strong rushing wind!
The soft pure air,
Came floating through that hall;—the Grecian air,
Laden with music—flute-notes from the vales,
Echoes of song—the last sweet sounds of life;
And the glad sunshine of the golden clime
Stream'd, as a royal mantle, round her form,
The glorified of love! But she—she look'd
Only on *him* for whom 't was joy to die.
Deep—deepest, holiest joy!—or if a thought
Of the warm sunlight, and the scented breeze,
And the sweet Dorian songs, o'erswept the tide
Of her unswerving soul—'t was but a thought
That own'd the summer-loveliness of life
For *him* a worthy offering!—so she stood,
Wrapt in bright silence, as entranced awhile,
Till her eye kindled, and her quivering frame
With the swift breeze of inspiration shook,
As the pale priestess trembles to the breath
Of inborn oracles!—then flush'd her cheek,
And all the triumph, all the agony,
Borne on the battling waves of love and death,
All from her woman's heart, in sudden song,
Burst like a fount of fire,
"I go, I go!
Thou Sun, thou golden Sun, I go,
Far from thy light to dwell;
Thou shalt not find my place below,
Dim is that world—bright Sun of Greece, farewell!

The Laurel and the glorious Rose
Thy glad beam yet may see,
But where no purple summer glows,
O'er the dark wave *I* haste from them and thee

Yet doth my spirit faint to part?
—I mourn thee not, O Sun!
Joy, solemn joy, o'erflows my heart,
Sing me triumphal songs!—my crown is won!

Let not a voice of weeping rise!
My heart is girt with power!

Let the green earth and festal skies
Laugh as to grace a conqueror's closing hour!

For thee, for *thee*, my bosom's lord,
Thee, my soul's loved! I die;
Thine is the torch of life restored,
Mine, mine the rapture, mine the victory!

Now may the boundless love, that lay
Unfathom'd still before,
In one consuming burst find way,
In one bright flood all, all its riches pour?

Thou know'st, thou know'st what love is *now!*
Its glory and its might—
Are they not written on my brow?
And will that image ever quit thy sight?

No! deathless in thy faithful breast,
There shall my memory keep
Its own bright altar-place of rest,
While o'er my grave the cypress branches weep.

—Oh! the glad light!—the light is fair,
The soft breeze warm and free,
And rich notes fill the scented air,
And all are gifts—*my* love's last gifts to thee!

Take me to thy warm heart once more!
Night falls—my pulse beats low—
Seek not to quicken, to restore,
Joy is in every pang—I go! I go!

I feel thy tears, I feel thy breath,
I meet thy fond look still;
Keen is the strife of love and death;
Faint and yet fainter grows my bosom's thrill.

Yet swells the tide of rapture strong,
Though mists o'ershade mine eye:
—Sing, Pæan! sing a conqueror's song!
For thee, for *thee*, my spirit's lord, I die!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BIRDS OF ARISTOPHANES.

Ancient Greek Comedy.

OFTEN during our present labours have we been assailed with complaints of the *heaviness* of ancient lore. The intervals which separate the nations of antiquity from ourselves are not overlooked and annihilated, save in the minds of the gifted and few. Genius alone can hold commerce with genius: and rolling ocean, or intevening ages, form to such commerce no barrier. But the majority of our readers are not men of genius. The very names of these Greeks frighten them. They imagine them musty old fellows with long beards, and longer faces: philosophers, lawgivers, and the like. Little know they what laughters, loud and long, have shaken those venerable cloak-enveloped sides: little do they imagine how the staid and severe Athenian audience '*haw-hawed*' (as Sam Slick would say) '*right out*' for hours together at the never-equalled drolleries of their comic poets.

Aristophanes.

As in every other department of classic literature, so here especially the ravages of Time must be deplored. A few plays of Aristophanes, himself but one of a fine constellation of wits, are all that his hand has spared, except a few fragments scattered up and down in miscellaneous quotation.

The Birds.

The play with which we have headed this chapter, is perhaps the *chef d'œuvre* of Aristophanes. For drollery of conception, beauty of language, variety of interest, it stands unrivalled in the Comedy of any age.

In presenting such a play to the English reader, much indulgence must be allowed us. Many of the witticisms, adapted to the circumstances of the times, and founded

frequently on local puns, will carry no force with them, when rendered into another language and placed before men of another age. It is only by an imaginary and unnatural state of mind that the *scholar* can fully partake of the exquisite relish of Attic humour; and such an effort we cannot expect the common reader to make, even when in possession of the necessary information. We shall therefore take great liberties with our author: our object being to please rather than to inform; and to entice rather than weary.

Argument. Two Athenians, (with hard names, which we will drop) sick of the bustle and wrangling of their native city, have set out on an expedition in search of an easy life. Their journey is a strange one. They are going to the *birds of the Air!* A raven and a jackdaw are their guides. They are advancing upwards, among the rocks and trees. Here we go up, up, up, is the order of the day. Gravity, in both senses of the word, is to them as nothing. They are 'righte merry fellows.' Still up they clamber. 'I have no nails left on my fingers,' says one, 'with following this brute of a jackdaw.' 'Where in the world are we?' says the other. 'Och dare, och dare,' cries the first, 'its we that have been cheated! that spalpeen at th' gameshop sould us yon brace o' brutes to shew us th' way to the king o' the birds, and they're o' no use at all at all—ther's a farthen gone for the jackdaw, and three for the raven. Look at the fool of a bird pointing right on. It isn't I that's going down over them cliffs to plase you, my jewel!'

2nd Athenian. There's no path here.
1st Athenian. Doesn't your raven point us either way?
2nd Athenian. No: she says nought but croak, croak, as before.
1st Athenian. Why, here's a hardship! we two want to go
Straight to the crows, and have packed up our all,
And then can't find our way! Why, there are many
Would give their eyes to be Athenians:
And we two, citizens by birth, have fled
On both our feet, not out of disrespect
To the old place, but to avoid the squabbles
Of law courts and the like,—and ta'en this journey,

A dish of fish,—I run and fetch it him :—
If he would have bean broth, I run and bruise them.

1st Athenian. Well then, my *Runner*, call your master to us.

Runner. He is asleep, just having had his luncheon,
Some myrtleberries and a gnat or two.

1st Athenian. Cannot you wake him ?

Runner. He'll be mighty sulky :
Still, if *you wish* it, I will go and wake him.

[*Exit.*

2nd Athenian. Bad luck go with ye ! I'm half dead with fear.

1st Athenian. Woe's me, my jackdaw's taken fright, and fled.

2nd Athenian. You coward—'twas *your* fright that *let him go.*

1st Athenian. Ha ! and your raven, you've let him go too !

2nd Athenian. Not I.

1st Athenian. Where is he then ?

2nd Athenian. He's fled.

1st Athenian. Brave fellow !
You tumbled down for funk, and he flew off.

Enter Hoopooe, the King of the Birds.

Hoopooe. Open the forest branches—give me way.

1st Athenian. St. Pathrick—what a baste ! where did ye get
Your wings ? who set the fashion of your crest ?

Hoopooe. Who seeks me ?

1st Athenian. May all the gods who dwell above,
De—*(aside)*—stroy your ugly phiz.

Hoopooe. Kind gentlemen,
I pray you mock me not : I know, my wings
Are somewhat funny : I was once a man.

1st Athenian. It is not you we laugh at, noble sir.

Hoopooe. What then ?

1st Athenian. Your beak has such a comical turn.
Are you a fowl, or a peacock ?

Hoopooe. I'm a fowl.

1st Athenian. Where are your feathers then ?

Hoopooe. They're fallen off.

1st Athenian. By some disease ?

Hoopooe. Oh no : we birds all moult
In winter time, and have new plumes in spring.
But who are you ?

1st Athenian. We ? mortals.

Hoopooe. On what errand
Are ye come hither?
1st Athenian. Wishing to speak with thee.
Hoopooe. Concerning what?
1st Athenian. Why, in the first place,
You have been once a man, as we are now:
And you have once owed debts, as we do now:
And have loved shirking them as we do now:
And then you took the nature of a bird,
And have been flying over land and sea,
With all the knowledge of both bird and man.
Wherefore we come to you as suppliants,
And beg of you, if you can, to point us out
Some nice soft place to live in, in whose comforts
One may enwrap one'sself, as in a blanket.
Hoopooe. Seek you a larger town than your own Athens?
1st Athenian. No, not a larger—one that suits us better.
Hoopooe. Oh ho! you want an aristocracy!
1st Athenian. Pah! I abhor the very mention of it.
Hoopooe. What kind of city then are ye in search of?
1st Athenian. One where there is no more serious business
Than to receive one's neighbour in the morning
And hear him say: 'up and prepare yourselves,
You and your children: I have a wedding toward.'
Hoopooe. Just such a city lies upon the shore
Of the Red Sea.
1st Athenian. I will not live by the sea:
Those horrid galleys will be coming for us.
How should we live up here, among the birds?
You've tried it, and can tell us.
Hoopooe. Passably:—
First, you must learn to live without a purse.
1st Athenian. One nuisance then at least will be removed.
Hoopooe. And then our food is buckwheat in the gardens,
The myrtleberry, poppyseed, and spearmint.
1st Athenian. Your life is a perpetual marriage feast.
2nd Athenian. Ha! a thought strikes me: be advised by me;
I have a scheme shall bring you wealth and power.
Hoopooe. What is it?
2nd Athenian. Why, this:—ye now are flying
Hither and thither, ranging up and down,

Within the cup, divinely carved, a woman
Is wrought, with robe and tiar: and by her standing,
Two youths with flowing hair contend to please her:
But she is nothing moved, smilingly looking
On each in turn, while they for love's vexation,
Straining each nerve, in vain their toil are spending.
Hard by, an ancient fisherman is plying
His trade on a steep rock, his net preparing
To cast into the sea: like one that labours
With all his might, he seems: the very sinews
All round about his neck are strained and swelling;—
His hair is gray, but his youth's strength is with him.
A little way beyond this old sea-farer,
A vineyard blushes with its purple branches:
The which a little knave is set to watch o'er,
Perched on the fence: and near him are two foxes;—
One up and down the vineyard gnaws the vintage:
The other has her sly eye on his wallet,
And by her look she says she will not leave him
Till she has filched his dinner. He with footstalks
Of asphodel a cricket-trap is platting,
And tying it with rushes: nor for his wallet
Cares he, nor for the vine-plants, half so much as
The cunning of his hands that knave delighteth.
All round the cup, on every side, is winding
The lithe acanthus. A rare piece, I tell thee:
And thou wilt say it. Of a Calydonian
Who hither sailed, I bought it; and I gave him
A bearded goat, and cake of white milk curded:—
Nor has it touched my lip, but I have kept it
Unsoiled. This goblet gladly will I give thee,
If thou wilt sing to me the song I bid thee.

The request is granted, and a very beautiful song it is. But we can only pause on it, in our way to greater beauties, to notice one passage, which has furnished our Milton with some exquisite lines in his Lycidas.

Where were ye, nymphs, where were ye, when young Daphnis
Was pining to his death? In the fair valleys
Of Tempe, by Penéüs, or on Pindus?
For ye were not by the Sicilian waters,
Nor Ætna's top, nor Acis' sacred fountain.

Thus Milton:

> Where were ye, nymphs, when the remorseless deep
> Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?
> For neither were ye playing on the steep,
> Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie:
> Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.

We should not omit to mention that the dirge for Lycidas is conceived by Milton after this very song of Theocritus, and contains many passages in common with it.

The seventh idyl is one of exceeding beauty. Three rustics are going to the feast of harvest home in the island of Cos. In the person of one of them the idyl is spoken. Two land owners of noble family are giving the feast. The travellers have not yet accomplished half their journey, when they meet a friend, a keeper of goats, who is a singer of rural songs. His address to them is too beautiful to be omitted: Idyl VII.

> Friends, whither fare ye in the burning midday,
> When in the stone fence sleeps the weary lizard,
> And from their flight the crested larks are resting?
> Are ye to some feast bid? or do ye hasten
> To tread some neighbour's wine-press? for your journey
> Is heard afar, and every stricken pebble
> Makes music on your sandals.
> Then I answered:
> My friend, all speak thee skilled in sweetest music:
> They say that none among the boors or neatherds
> Surpasseth thee: wherefore it gives me pleasure
> To try my strength with thine:—our way thou askest
> Is to the harvest home; our friends are holding
> A feast to bounteous Ceres, and are offering
> The first fruits of their store, which she hath lavished
> In measure full into their barns. But hear me:
> Since thou art going with us, let some ditty
> Be sung by each, for each will hear delighted.

The proposal is accepted, and the songs are sung: but it is to the passage following them that we would especially call the attention of our readers:

We sung, and parted: he the left road taking;
We making for the grounds of Phrasidámus:
There Eucritus and I, and fair Amyntas,
Reclined on branches of the fragrant lentisk,
And vine-leaves newly cut, our pleasure taking.
Above our heads elms and tall poplars rustled:
And a pure fount hard by of sacred water
Came trickling from its cave with soothing murmur.
In the thick boughs the shrill cicalas jinging
Plied their loud work: and from the distant thicket
The thrush piped loudly. Overhead the skylark
Sung, and the painted goldfinch: and the turtle
Plaintively coo'd: and yellow bees were humming
Hither and thither round the running water.
There was a goodly smell around, of summer
And her rich gifts that deck the golden autumn.
Ripe pears were at our feet, and blushing apples
Fell on each side: and with the bloomed plum bending
Thick branches swept the ground.

This description has never been surpassed in Pastoral Poetry; in the original the lines are the most musical that can be imagined, and add, by their music, to the beauty of the passage, in a way which those cannot conceive who have not the luxury of knowing that divine language. We shall now pass on to the most dramatic of the idyls of Theocritus, entitled, 'The women celebrating the feast of Adonis.' The scene of this idyl is at Alexandria: the time, during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus. At the feast of Adonis, it was customary for matrons to dress and ornament his statue, and to take it and wash it in the sea. The persons introduced are

The Adoniazusæ.

Gorgo.
Praxinoa. } *two Sicilian women, but now settled at Alexandria.*
An old woman.
A stranger.
Another stranger.

SCENE.—*Praxinoa's house in the suburbs of Alexandria.*

Gorgo (without.)
At home, Praxinoa?

Praxinoa. At home: why, gossip Gorgo,
How late you are—well, 'tis my only wonder
That you have come at all. Here, Eunoë,
Fetch yonder chair for the lady; get a cushion
And place upon it.
Gorgo. Thanks: it can't be better.
Praxinoa. Be seated then.
Gorgo. Ah! what a spirit I have
For battling through all troubles! scarcely could I reach
Your door in safety, for the mob and chariots:
Police and soldiers thronging every where;—
'Tis a hard way—you live too far from me.
Praxinoa. And all because that fool, my lord and master,
Chose, at the end o' th' town, to buy this hole,
No house, I'm sure—that we might not be neighbours:
And I have quarrelled with him ever since.
Gorgo. Call not your husband Dinon such hard names
Before the child: see how he stares at you.
Praxinoa. So; cheerly, boy! 't was not papa we talked of.
Gorgo. He takes!—the infant takes it. Nice papa!
Praxinoa. That '*nice papa*' the other day, (we call
All things '*the other day*') went forth to buy
Nitre and rouge, to deck me for this day,
And brought me nought but salt—the gawky lout!
Gorgo. And mine's his very double: a mere pest
Of cash: five fleeces bought he for seven drachmæ
But yesterday; such things! mere hair of dogs,
Or pluckings of old bags, all waste, no profit.
But come, your cloak put on, and your brooched tunic;
Let us be off to Ptolemy's high palace,
To see this grand Adonis: for they say
The queen has noble doings to display.
Praxinoa. Aye, aye: the proverb says, 'grand men, grand things:'
What one has seen, hereafter one can tell.
Gorgo. It should be time to go:—you idle ones
Are ever keeping holiday.
Praxinoa. You, Eunoa,
Take up your wool, and take care how you leave it
Thus on the floor again. Cats *will* lie softly.
Come, stir thee, bring some water: first, some water
Is wanting;—do but see her, how she brings it—
Give it me notwithstanding—not so much!

Pour not so fast—you've wetted all my tunic!
Hold. Well—I've washed, as far as fate would let me:—
Where is the large chest key? bring it me here.

Gorgo. Praxinoa, how that folding tunic suits you!
Tell me how much it cost you from the loom.

Praxinoa. Pray speak not of it—for two silver minæ
Would not have cleared it: and upon the work
I spent my very soul.

Gorgo. But it has paid your labour.

Praxinoa. Well; now you praise it, 'tis a pretty tunic.
Bring me my cloak and parasol. Dispose it
In graceful folds about me.—No, child, no:
I won't take you:—bah bah! horse bites! Ah, cry
As you think proper, but you shan't be lamed.
Phrygia, play with the child;—call in the dog,
Shut the hall door.

[*The scene changes to the public road near the town.*]

Heav'ns! what a crowd is here!
How shall we pass them all, and when? like ants,
There is no number, nor no end to them.
—Many good deeds, O Ptolemy, are thine:
Since to the gods thy father was removed,
No robbers, after Egypt's former fashion,
Deceive the traveller: but before, sly villains
Played their false games upon unwary men.
Ah! dearest Gorgo, what will happen to us?
Here are the chargers of the king. Good neighbour,
Don't trample me—yon bay one, how he rears!
How wild he is! Eunoa, keep off from him!
He'll kill the man that leads him. I'm right glad
I left my child within.

Gorgo. Be comforted:
We are behind them now: they have past on.

Praxinva. Ah, now I feel myself again. Your horse,
And your cold snake, have ever frighted me,
Ev'n from a child. Come, let us hasten on:
What multitudes are pressing us behind!

Gorgo. (addressing an old woman.)
Good mother, from the palace?

Old Woman. Aye, my children.

Gorgo. Well, is it easy to get in?

Old Woman. The Greeks
Got into Troy by trying. My good girls,
All things are done by trial.
[*She passes them.*]
Gorgo. The old soul
Has left us with an oracle to solve.
Praxinoa. Women know all things—even what the gods
Say to each other.
Gorgo. Look, Praxinoa,
What thousands are about the palace doors!
Praxinoa. Myriads! here, Gorgo, give your hand to me:
You, Eunoa, take Eutychis by the hand:
Look to her, lest you lose her:—let us enter
Thus all together;—Eunoa, keep close;—
Ah me! my cloak is rent! My dearest man,
As you'd be happy, let alone my cloak.
Stranger. I cannot move—I'll save it, if I can.
Praxinoa. Faugh! what a crowd! they thrust and poke like swine
Stranger. Be happy, ladies: we're in safety now.
Praxinoa. This year, and next, good neighbour, may you thrive,
For taking care of us. What a kind man!
Our Eunoa is squeezed—come, force thy way:
So—it is well: *we're all in*, as he said
Who shut his chamber door his bridal night.
Gorgo. Praxinoa, look here! this work in colours,
How thin and beautiful! the goddesses,
You'll say, themselves have wrought it.
Praxinoa. Athensea!
What spinsters ever wrought the like of this?
What painters ever painted these? How true
The animals are standing? How they seem
Even to move! They must be living things,
Not woven work. Man is a clever thing!
How beautiful Adonis lies, extended
On silver bed, his temples clothed around
With the first tresses of his youthful hair:
Thrice loved Adonis, lovely ev'n in death!
Another Stranger. Cease with your clatter, women: you mar all
With your barbarian noise. *

* The stranger, being an Alexandrian, is offended with the Dorian dialect, which these good wives spoke in all its *breadth*.

Gorgo. Well, who are you?
What business is't of yours, if we are chattering?
I beg you'll rule your own: do you presume
Thus to lay down the law to Syracusans?
I tell you we're Corinthians by descent,*
As was Bellerophon: and we talk, sir,
As Peloponnesians talk: I should imagine
Dorian women may in Dorian speak.
Praxinoa. Goddess of human births! may never man
Be born who shall rule me: *one* does, indeed:
Well, 'tis no matter: for thou need'st not wipe
An empty dish for me. †
Gorgo. Silence, Praxinoa:
The clever Argive singer is preparing
To sing the song in praise of young Adonis.
Sure, 't will be something clever: hark, already
She quavers up and down by way of prelude.

Here follows a song in praise of Adonis, exceeding sweet, but withal not so delightsome for our readers as much which must be left out of this Chapter, if it be inserted. The song ceases.

Gorgo. Praxinoa, what a clever thing! How happy
Is she in knowing this! and how thrice happy
For singing it so sweetly! Well, 'tis time
For us to go: my husband wants his dinner:
And then he's vinegar's self. May you ne'er meet him
When he is hungry! Well—farewell, Adonis:
Be happy, thou and thine, beloved Adonis!

This idyl will have furnished our readers with the most faithful and amusing sketch on record of the domestic life of the lower orders of Greeks. We will now pass to another kind of beauty. The twenty-first idyl is entitled 'The Fishermen,' and consists of a dialogue between Asphalion and his partner,' prefaced by a description from the poet.

Idyl XXI.

* Syracuse was a colony of Corinth. Bellerophon was son of Glaucus, king of Corinth.

† In rendering this very difficult passage, I have supposed the *one* man to mean her husband: and the following lines to imply that she cares not for his rule; and prays not to be delivered from it, the dish being already empty, so that wiping it is no object. I do not say I am satisfied with this rendering: but it is a choice of evils.

'Tis poverty alone that makes the arts:
'Tis she that teaches labour: for thick cares
Permit the working man not ev'n to sleep.
Two aged fishermen together lay,
On the dry seaweed, 'neath their hut of boughs,
Against the leafy wall: and near them lay
The labour of their hands: their lobster-pots,
Their rods, and hooks, and weedy baits oft-used;
Old ropes, and eel-traps, mazes wrought of rush,
Lines, and two oars, and an old fishing-boat
Fixed on its stays; and underneath their heads
Was a poor mat, and on it their few clothes,
And hats: this was the whole the fishers had,
These all their wealth: no drinking pot was theirs,
No measure for their corn: all such things seemed beside
The toil by which they lived: and poverty
Was their best friend; no neighbour had they near:
But ever by their worn hut's side, the sea
Made murmur with its ripples gently heaving.
Nor yet the car-borne moon held half her course,
When their accustomed toil the fishers woke:
And waking, thus they one to other sang:—

Asphalion. They err, my friend, who tell us that the nights
Grow short in summer, when the days are long.
Already have I seen a thousand dreams,
And yet it is not day. Have I forgotten?
Or have the nights in verity grown long?
Partner. Blame you the pleasant summer? For the time
Glides not at its own will: care, which divides
Your sleep asunder, makes your nights seem long.
Asphalion. Can'st thou interpret dreams? Mine have been good;
And I am loath to hide the vision from thee;
For as our toil, so should we share our dreams.
Besides, just now there's leisure; for what else
Can occupy us, seeing that these leaves
Form not a couch inviting us to sleep,
And all the lamp we have to aid our toil
Is the town lantern in the public hall,
No other—*that* indeed is ever lit.
Partner. Tell me thy dreams, and open all thy care.
Asphalion. Well; in the evening, when I fell asleep,

(Not having over-supped, if you remember,
For our last meal was early, and we stinted
Our appetites) I seemed to see myself
Reclining on a rock: from whence I fished,
And from my rod shook the enticing bait.
One large fish took it; (for as dogs of meat,
We fishers dream of fishes) on the hook
He hung, and his blood flowed: my rod bent double,
With his fierce struggles. Straining both my hands,
I laboured much to land the monster fish
With tackle weak as mine. Then, to remind him
Of the hook's place, I gently struck him: then
Loosed line again, and when he fled not, pulled.
At length I drew him up: a fish of gold!
All over yellow gold! Dread seized on me,
For fear he were some sacred fish, by Neptune
Beloved, or azure Amphitrite, his spouse.
Gently I loosed him from the clinging hook,
Lest any gold should hang upon its barb.
Next in my landing net bearing him off,
I carried him to shore: and then I made
An oath that I would go to sea no more,
But keep ashore, and live upon my gold.
With this thought I awoke; now tell me, friend,
Thy judgment: for I fear the oath I swore.

Partner. Be not afraid: you swore not: for you have not
The golden fish: both dreams were false alike.
But if in sober truth you fish that place,
Hoping from this your dream,—seek fish of flesh,
And fly from starving, though on dreams of gold.

One or two more beauties of Theocritus will detain us awhile from the other pastoral poets. In an idyl entitled 'The Little Hercules,' the following delightful description occurs:

Once on a time Alcmena in the ev'ning,
When Hercules was ten months old, and younger
But one night, little Iphicles his brother,
Having first washed them both, and from her fair breast
Filled them with milk, in the great buckler placed them,
The brazen buckler, which from Pterelaus
Her husband won in war. Then, the heads touching

Of both her babes, she spoke: 'Sleep, my sweet babies,
A soft and waking slumber. Sleep, my darlings,
Two brothers dear;—be your night-hours safe guarded—
Happy your slumbers be, your waking happy!'
This said, she rocked the shield, and sleep fell on them.
Now when the Bear at midnight to the westward
Is turned, and bright Orion shews his shoulder
Over against it, Hera,* in her treachery,
Sent to the threshold broad two mailed dragons,
Gleaming with azure folds: and when the doorposts
Leave space for entrance, into the dark chamber
She let them, urging them with threats, to make for
The infant Hercules, and there devour him.
They on the ground their spiry folds unrolling,
Glided with murderous speed: while from their eyeballs
Flashed lurid fire, and from their jaws dripped venom.
When near the infants they were now approaching,
Then (so great Zeus had ordered it) the children
Woke both together, and throughout the chamber
Shone a bright light. The one cried out in terror,
When he beheld the evil beasts above him,
Over the broad shield looking, and displaying
Their pitiless teeth; and kicked the woolly blanket,
Striving to fly: but Hercules, the other
Springing upright, with both hands seized the monsters,
Under their throats, where lie their bags of poison,
Which even gods detest; the tortured serpents
Wound their dark volumes round the boy, the suckling,
The lately-born, who knew not fear nor wailing:
But soon unwound again beneath the pressure
Of the hard grasp, in vain for lifebreath writhing.
Alcmena heard the crying and awoke first.
'Amphitryon, rise: I am in sudden terror:
'Hearest not how the younger of our children
'Shrieks with alarm? Rise, and do not tarry
'To bind thy sandals. Dost thou perceive the chambers
'Shine with bright light when yet it is not dawning?
'Some dreadful thing is in the house, dear husband.'
She spoke, and from the bed Amphitryon started:
And went for his great sword, which always ready
Hung on a nail above the cedar bedstead.

* Juno, the enemy of Hercules.

First for the thong he felt, then the vast scabbard
He lifted with the other hand, and freed it:
For darkness now again had filled the chamber.
Therefore he called the servants, hoarsely breathing
In sleep around; 'Bring light from off the hearthstone,
'And open all the doors. Rise up, my servants:
'The master calls.' Soon came with lights the household,
And filled the chamber, each one blithly hastening.
But when they saw young Hercules, the nursling,
Clasping the monsters in his tender fingers,
They all exclaimed, and smote their hands together:
But he held out the serpents to his father,
And leapt on high with infant joy triumphant,
Laughing, and throwing down before Amphitryon
The ghastly monsters, now in death relaxing.
Then fair Alcmena took to her own bosom
Iphicles, stiff with fear and loudly shrieking:
The while Amphitryon in the lambswool blanket
Wrapped the young Hercules: then back returning
To his own bed, betook himself to slumber.

One more, and that a morsel, from the Sicilian poet. It is a small epigram, addressed to a friend on the loss of his goat: the metre is that of the original:

Ah, thou poor Thyrsis, what boots it if thou in weeping
Ceaselessly night and day, floodest thine eyesight away?
Gone past hope is thy kid, to the land where all must follow:
Wolf with his nails of horn thy beautiful darling hath torn.
The dogs bark after the thief, but not one limb can they rescue:
Thou hast not, to tempt thee to weep, even his ashes to keep.

The other principal pastoral poets of Greece, Bion and Moschus, were contemporary with Theocritus, or nearly so. From the first we shall translate but one short idyl, which is perhaps the best specimen of his powers.

A fowler, yet a boy, among a grove of stately trees
Was catching birds, and saw young Love, the cruel little god,
Perching upon a box-tree spray: whom when he saw, right glad,
Thinking that he had found a bird far larger than the rest,

He fitted on his tackle well, and watched him as he hopped
Hither and thither. But at last, when hope was weary waxed,
He cast away his reeds, and to an ancient ploughman came
Who taught him all his art: to him he told the whole affair,
And shewed him Love, where he was perched. The old man shook
his head,
And smiling said, 'Give over chase, and come not near this bird:
'Fly far away: it is an evil beast: and thou shalt be
'Thrice happy, never catching him: for when thou growest up
'To man's estate, this bird, who flieth from thee now,
'Shall come and perch upon thy head, an unexpected guest.'

From the other, Moschus, our extracts will be more lengthy. He was a disciple of Bion, and outdid his master: the following beautiful idyl, however, is disputed between them:

TO THE EVENING STAR.

VESPER, golden light of the lovely ocean queen,
Vesper, sacred glory of the dark blue night,
Fainter than the moon, as thou outshinest every star,
Hail, planet dear: and as I seek my love's abode,
Light me on the moon's behalf: who, only born to-day,
Hath early set: I journey not for plunder, nor to stop
The nightly trav'ller on his way: but I a lover am,
And it is meet that those who love should in return be loved.

This poet wrote the epitaph of his master, Bion. And of all the pieces of Greek pastoral poetry, we must confess we think this epitaph holds the highest place in point of sweetness of versification, and tenderness of sentiment. The reader of Shelley will at once recognize in it the type of the Adonais of that Poet: which, beautiful though it be, must yet yield the palm to Moschus.

THE EPITAPH OF BION.

DOLEFULLY sound, ye groves and Dorian waters,
Lament, ye rivers, our beloved Bion;
Mourn, all ye plants, and whisper low, ye forests,
Ye flowers, breathe sadly from your drooping petals;

Put on deep red, anemones and roses;
Wail thine own letters, hyacinth, and ai ai
Write double on thy leaves for our sweet poet.*

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Ye nightingales, in the thick leafage sobbing,
Tell the Sicilian streams of Arethusa
Bion is dead, the shepherd-boy, and with him
Song too is dead, and all the Dorian music.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Strymonian swans, sing sadly by your waters;†
Warble a funeral elegy, in ditties
Such as he sung, the rival of your voices.
Tell the Œagrian Nymphs, and tell the damsels
That play in Thrace, dead is the Dorian Orpheus.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Our friend shall pipe beside his flocks no longer,
Nor sit and sing alone beneath the ilex;
But tunes oblivious strains to sullen Pluto.
Mute are the mountains, and the herd is straying
And will not feed, but wanders sadly lowing.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Thine early death lamented great Apollo,
Pan wept to miss thy singing, all the Naiads
Wept in their woods, and turned to tears their fountains;
Echo is weeping that she must be silent,
Thy lips no longer mocking. At thy parting
Trees shed their fruits, and all the flowers were blighted;
Milk failed the flocks, and in our hives the honey
Sunk mouldering in the wax; for no more sweetness
Shall there be, now thy honey-song hath perished.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Not so beside the sea-beach wailed the dolphin,
Nor nightingale in shrubby rocks embowered,
Nor on the long green hills the piping swallow;

* The hyacinth, which sprung from the blood of the youth Hyacinthus, was supposed by the poets to be inscribed with ai ai, the Greek exclamation of sorrow.

† Strymon is a river separating Thrace from Macedonia. Orpheus was a Thracian, and the son of Œagrius.

Not so his fond Alcyone wept Ceÿx;*
Nor Cerylus † along the dark-blue waters;
Not so in Eastern dells the birds of Memnon
Wailed, flying round his tomb, the son of Aö,‡
As all lamented for the death of Bion.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Shepherd, with thee the Muses' gifts have perished—
All beauty, and the joy of youthful lovers—
Sadly the Lovers round thy tomb are weeping:
Cypris hath loved thee better than the memory
Of the last kiss she prest on pale Adonis.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Thou tunefullest of streams, a second sorrow,
A second sorrow, Meles, hath befallen;
Thy Homer died, sweet prophet of the Muses;
And then, they say, thy glorious son thou wailedst
Along thy shallows, and far into ocean
Carriedst the sound of grief: and now another
Must thou lament, and dry away for anguish.
Both were beloved by fountains: one was favoured
Of Hippocrene, and one of Arethusa;
One sung the lay of Tyndarus' fair daughter,§
The son of Thetis, and the twin Atreidæ;
But ours no wars, nor tears—the god of shepherds
And herdsmen sung he, as his flock he tended,
And bound the syrinx, and milked the sweet-breathed heifers,
And spake of Love, and was dear to Aphrodita.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
All countries mourn for thee, all ancient cities:
Not so mourned Ascra for her shepherd-prophet; ||
Not so the castled Lesbos for Alcæus;
Nor Ceos her old songster; not so Paros

* Ceÿx, king of Trachinia, being drowned, his widow Alcyone mourned for him till both were changed into halcyons.

† The kingfisher.

‡ Memnon, king of Æthiopia, killed by Achilles in the Trojan war. A flight of birds rose from his funeral pile and fought till many of them died. This conflict was supposed to be renewed yearly over his tomb. He was the son of Ao or Eo, the morning.

§ Helen. || Hesiod.

Archilochus desires; and leaving Sappho
Thy legend sings the widowed Mitylene.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Alas! when mallows perish in the gardens,
The crisp-green parsley, and the hardy anise,
They live again, and grow another summer;
But we, the great and strong, the sons of wisdom,
When first we die, unknown in earthly hollow
Sleep a long boundless sleep, that hath no waking.
Thou shalt be gathered to the dust in silence,
But sorry songsters live and sing for ever:
Well have the Muses ordered it, for better
Sing sweet and die, than be like them immortal.

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Poison hath touched thy mouth, a draught of poison;—
How came it to thy lips and was not sweetened?
What man so cruel that for thee could mingle,
Or offering it escaped uncharmed thy singing?

Begin the grief, begin, Sicilian Muses.
Who now shall sound thy reed, beloved poet?
Who is so bold that to his lips will bear it?
To Pan I offer it; but Pan refuses
To wake its melody, lest he in playing
Should miss thy skill, and be adjudged thy second.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ANTHOLOGY.

O Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty: violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath: pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength: bold oxlips, and
The crown-imperial: lilies of all kinds,
The flower de luce being one: O, these I lack,
To make you garlands of.

Winter's Tale. Act IV. Sc. III.

Our concluding chapter will be somewhat similar to that in which we gathered up the fragments of the lost Poets, except that our present collection is not one of broken pieces, but of short entire poems, which have in all ages been the depositories of bright and sparkling thoughts. These have been collected for us in a volume entitled, very appropriately, 'The Anthology:' this word importing 'a collection of flowers.' One of the poets, whose small works are comprised in it, by name Meleager, has been so particular as to assign to each poet or poetess his or her particular blossom, as emblematical of characteristics found to exist in the poems collected. We shall not however trouble our readers to follow Meleager through his somewhat fanciful assignations, but shall proceed without further delay to *our selection* from the Anthology: our choicer and smaller bouquet, procured by untying and examining one by one the sprigs and blooms contained in the larger garland. In our present task, names will import but little to our readers, except where we present a blossom grown

in some illustrious garden, well known for other fruits: it will suffice to know that the authors, whose designations we shall give in our margin, were scattered over the various ages of Grecian lore, and the widely distant places where Grecian ideas of the beautiful had taken root and bloomed.

Plato the philosopher.

We commence with a famous and hallowed name—that of Plato himself. From a mind such as his, revelling in the stores of one of the richest imaginations ever bestowed on man, we might expect, and we have blooms of exquisite beauty:—behold the first:

> Thyself *my* star, thou gazest up into the starry skies:
> Would I were Heav'n, to look on *thee* with all those myriad eyes.

This may be called a conceit: but it is one of those conceits, which, the longer we think on it, presents to us deeper and fresher beauty. Here is another: Laïs, in her old age, dedicates her mirror to Venus:

> I, Laïs, whose proud doors were wont to be
> The haunt of Greece, this mirror bring to thee:
> Such as I am, I would not now be seen:
> And I can view no longer what I've been.*

The following is on the statue of Venus by Praxiteles:

> The Paphian goddess o'er the billows flew,
> Her statue in her Cnidian fane to view:
> And, while all round her bashful eyes she roll'd,
> "Where did Praxiteles so much behold?"

A traveller had been thirsty on his way, and being guided to a clear spring by the voice of a frog, erects a bronze image of his guide, to the local nymphs, with this inscription:

> Me, the moist servant of the nymphs that dwell
> Where I croak forth my song in fount or well,

* We cannot omit Matthew Prior's neat rendering of this epigram:

> Venus, take my votive glass:
> Since I am not what I was,
> What from this day I shall be,
> Venus, let me never see.

A traveller shaping here doth dedicate,
Well pleased the fever of his thirst to sate.
Beside his road this fountain I made known,
From my wet hiding-place with lucky tone:
My guiding voice he followed, and acquired
The sweet fresh water which his soul desired.

In another epigram Plato bears honourable testimony to the high estimation in which Aristophanes was held by his contemporaries, and effectually silences the rumour of his enmity to Socrates, of whom it is needless to say Plato was an ardent and affectionate disciple:

The Graces, bent some lasting throne to find,
Found it in Aristophanes's mind.

He also bears testimony to Sappho:

Some call the Muses nine: but they forget—
A tenth, our Sappho, must be reckoned yet.

Our next is curious from its proving the extreme capability of the Greek tongue for expressing much in few words: the original, rendered into literal English, runs thus:

'A man having found some gold, (took it away and) left a halter: but the other not finding the gold which he had left, attached (to his neck) the halter which he found.'

All this is expressed in two lines,* containing sixteen words. Coleridge, in his literary remains, (vol. i. p. 337) gives a translation which he says, 'is a mere trial of comparative brevity, wit and poetry quite out of the question:

Jack finding gold, left a rope on the ground:
Bill, missing his gold, us'd the rope which he found.

We have tried another version:

One found some cash, and left a halter in its stead:
T'other missed his cash, and slipped the halter o'er his head.

* χρυσὸν ἀνὴρ εὑρὼν ἔλιπε βρόχον· αὐτὰρ ὁ χρυσὸν
ὃν λίπεν οὐχ εὑρὼν, ἧψεν ὃν εὗρε βρόχον.

Here is another of comic import:

ON A STRIPPED CORPSE OF A SHIPWRECKED MARINER.

You see me here, a shipwrecked man ·
  Whom e'en the ocean spared:
Nor my poor limbs, in decency,
  Of their last garment bared.

Man passing by, with shameless hands
  My covering bore away,
Willing, for such small gain, such guilt
  Upon his soul to lay.

I only wish that he my wear
  My rags when life is gone;
So that the judge i' th' shades below
  May see him with them on.

We can only give one more from Plato, but it is very beautiful:

Once, when in life, thou wert my morning star:
Thy rays in death now dim and west'ring are.

Speusippus. After these should come the Epigram of Speusippus the disciple of Plato:

Earth in her bosom Plato's corse contains:
His soul amongst the blessed lives and reigns.

A SCENE BY THE SHORE.

Mnasalcus. Here let us stand, on the wave-washed shore,
  In sight of yonder temple of the sea-born Queen of love:
And watch the gold bright halcyons, blithely skimming o'er
  This fountain shaded round by poplars high above.

Nossis. Nossis was a Locrian Poetess, of whose remains the following is the sweetest, on a statue of her daughter Melinna:

It is Melinna's self! How blandly there
Her look salutes me, and her wonted air!
How truly like her mother! Happy we,
When in our offspring we our image see!

Another poetess follows: Anytè, of Tegea in Arcadia. Out of several pretty Epigrams of hers we select these: Anytè.

ON A STATUE OF VENUS BY THE SEA.

The Cyprian goddess owns this spot:
For she doth alway love
To look upon the glittering sea
From the high cliffs above:
By her protection, sailors may
Their voyage steer aright:
For ocean round is still with awe,
Seeing her image bright.

AT THE MOUTH OF A CAVE.

Stranger, beneath this rock from toil repose;
Here, mid green leaves, the winds make music sweet:
Drink of the cooling stream that by thee flows:
Such rest is pleasant in the noon-tide heat.

ON A DOLPHIN THROWN ASHORE.

No more, rejoicing in the watery ways,
Swift from the depths shall I my neck upraise:
Nor by embattled ship my spout upthrow,
Pleased with my image carved upon her prow:
The storm-cloud dark hath thrust me to the shore,
And the thin sand hath strewed my body o'er.

These parting words, around her father dear
Casting her arms, with many a woeful tear,
Spake Erato: my father, I'm no more:
Death holds his veil these darkening eyes before!

A beggar once I lived: Death laid me low:
The great Darius is my equal now.

Mourn for Antibia, for whose wisdom's fame,
And radiant beauty, numerous suitors came:
But envious Death before them all pressed in,
And crushed their hopes, this peerless prize to win.

Asclepiades

There were several writers of Epigrams named Asclepiades. One of them was author of the following singularly beautiful lines to Hesiod:

The Muses saw thee, Hesiod, on the rocks,
In the hot midday, shepherding thy flocks;
And plucking from the laurel groves around
Their sacred twigs, thy favoured temples crowned;
Then of that stream poetic on thee shed,
Which sprung beneath the winged courser's tread;
Inspired with which, thy hallowed lays combine
Old heroes' works and praise, and Heav'n's illustrious line.

Leonidas of Tarentum.

Leonidas of Tarentum has left us a hundred short pieces from which we have chosen the following:

ON A STATUE OF VENUS RISING FROM THE SEA.

Out from her mother's bosom just escaping,
Dripping with spray, Love's goddess by Apelles
Was seen—and he expressed her, not in fancy,
But as she lived and moved. Lightly her fingers
Pressed the sea-waters from her flowing tresses;
Sweetly calm love shines out beneath her eyelids:
Fair, in ripe womanhood, her breast is swelling.
Athena and the queen of heaven must own her
Victorious in the strife of grace and beauty.

ON THE STATUE OF A COW BY MYRON.

He carved me not in stone: but from the herd
Driving, transformed to marble with a word.

ADDRESS TO SAILORS ON THE RETURN OF SPRING.

Favoured will your sailing be;
The swallow's happy wings
Skim the tepid breezes
Where the rising Zephyrs sing:
Fair bloom the meadows now,
The Ocean's broil is done,

Lightly fall the shadows now,
And brightly beams the sun;—
Haul ye up your anchors now,
Loose ye from the land—
And to the favouring breezes now
Each straining sail expand.

EPITAPH.

Stranger, if in winter thou be drunk,
Walk not forth by night:
If he who lies below had this observed,
He were not in this plight.

Nicias, a physician, occasionally addressed by Theocritus in his idyls, furnishes the two following: Nicias.

TO THE BEE.

Many coloured, sunshine-loving, spring-betokening Bee!
Yellow Bee, so mad for love of early-blooming flow'rs;
Till thy waxen cell be full, fair fall thy work and thee,
Buzzing round the sweetly-smelling orchard plots and bow'rs;

ON A CICADA CRUSHED BY A CHILD.

I shall never sing my pleasant ditty now,
Folded round by long leaves on the bough,
Under my shrilly-chirping wing:
For a child's hand seized me in a luckless hour,
Sitting on the petals of a flower,
Looking for no such evil thing.*

Diotimus, a schoolmaster, comes next in order, from whom we have the following pleasing Epitaph: Diotimus.

Two aged matrons, daughters of one sire,
Lie in one tomb:—twin-buried and twin-born:
Æano, the priestess of the Graces' quire,—
Anaxo, unto Ceres' service sworn.

* These two translations have been before published, having been contributed to Merivale's edition of Bland's translations from the Anthology.

Nine suns were wanting to our eightieth year:
We died together—who would covet more?
We held our husbands and our children dear:
Nor death unkind, to which we sped before.*

Aratus. This very Diotimus is commiserated in the following Epigram by Aratus, author of a lost poem on astronomy and signs of weather:

I pity Diotimus, 'mid the rocks keeping school,
And dinning Alpha Beta into many a little fool.

Hegesippus. Hegesippus gives us the following sharp but playful Epitaph:

ON TIMON THE MISANTHROPE.

Timon speaks. All round this tomb with many a thorny spear
Acanthus bristles: if you draw too near,
You prick your feet: Timon's within: begone.
Passenger. Am I to curse thee?
Timon. No: only pass on.

Callimachus. Here is Timon again: the author, Callimachus, well known as the poet of many hymns, and who furnished to the Latin poets their principal pattern.

Qu. Which hat'st thou most, the shades, or the upper air?
Timon. The shades: for more than half mankind are there.

"He who to enjoy
Plato's elysium, leapt into the sea,
Cleombrotus." *Milton.*

Cleombrotus exclaimed, 'Farewell thou light,'
And leapt to Hades from a rampart's height;
No evil suffering, worthy of such fate:
But rapt with Plato's visions of th' immortal state.

* This translation, from the above work, is by my friend the Rev. C. Merivale. Being unable to better it, I have borrowed it.

A MOTHER'S DESPAIR.

Menecrates of Smyrna.

Three darling children a fond mother laid
On the sad pile, in funeral garb arrayed:
Having a fourth time borne maternal pains
No more for Hope's dim promise she remains:
But while upon the fire in anxious haste
Piled for the dead, the living babe she placed:
Thus cried: No more my bosom will I drain
For thee, stern Death: thus much relief I gain.

Here is a sharp cut on the Cappadocians, by one Demodocus: Demodocus.

A viper once a Cappadocian bit:
The viper died of it.

ON A STATUE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT.

Archelaus.

Lysippus hath this mass of marble wrought,
With all the conqueror's mien and daring fraught:
The statue seems to gaze aloft, and say,
Mine is the earth, O Jove: content thee with heavn's sway.

From Epigrams by uncertain authors, of which the Anthology contains upwards of seven hundred, we have selected the following, some of which are among the most beautiful flowers of our bouquet. Uncertain Authors

THE ROSE.

Brief is the life of the rose:
Pass but the spot where it grows,
And the branch which its bloom did adorn
Shall bear thee no rose,—but a thorn.

THE WISH.

Were I some wandering breath of air,
That when thou art with heat opprest,
And dost thy glowing breast lay bare,
Thou might'st receive me to that breast!

Were I some rose, whose crimson clear
Is laced with purple streaks below,
That thou might'st pluck, and place me near
The whiteness of thy bosom's snow!

ON A FAIR GIRL BATHING IN THE NILE.

Venus saw thee swimming there,
And exclaimed with frighted air:
"What! hath Nile in envy sent
From its rival element
A new goddess bright and fair?"

VAIN OFFERINGS.

Bring not your incense to my tomb,
Hang no fond garlands there;
Court not the senseless stone with fire,
Your vain expences spare.
While yet I live, if ought you have,
Give it, and there's no waste:
Your wine may turn my dust to mud,
But dead men cannot taste.

THE COMPACT.

A doctor, and a handler of the spade,
For mutual gain a mutual compact made:
The sexton stole the dead men's drawers and shirts
And sent them to the leech to bind up hurts:
He in return might his good faith aver—
He sent the sexton patients to inter.

ON AN ARMED STATUE OF VENUS AT LACEDÆMON.

Pallas passing by, beheld
Venus harness'd for the field—
Says she, "will you fight?"
"Why, if with my naked charms
I can conquer you, in arms
I should crush you quite."

ON A STATUE OF NIOBE BY PRAXITELES.

The gods me living into stone transformed:
Praxiteles the stone with life hath warmed.

ON A CLEAR FOUNTAIN.

Either the radiant Queen of Love
Sprung from this crystal wave,
Or bathing here her limbs, to it
Her own sweet essence gave.

ON AN OLIVE TREE, ROUND WHICH CREPT A VINE.

The virgin Pallas is my patroness:
What do these Bacchic clusters there?
Take them away: for drunkenness
Is not a virgin's care.

MARRIAGE.

There is no married man who is not lost:
All know it,—and all marry to their cost.

CRABBED AGE.

If in a cask of pleasant wine
A remnant small be left,
It soon to vinegar is turned—
Of all its sweetness reft.
Thus when the cask of time is drawn,
And o'er the dregs we brood,
The vinegar of life is found
In age's surly mood.

ON A SHE-GOAT SUCKLING A WOLF.

Yon wolf I suckle, which my will denies,
Forced by my shepherd's order strange:
For from me nourished, 'gainst me it will rise:
So little Love can nature change.

CROSS PURPOSES.

Once I was young, but poor: now rich, and old:
My pitiable lot in both was one:
Who when I could have used it, had not gold;
And have abundance, now the power is gone.

MISTAKEN NOTIONS.

All say that you are rich: I call you poor.
For he is rich who wealth's enjoyment shares:
The man who keeps his treasure for his heirs
Is but spectator of another's store.

RICH AND POOR.

Diogenes the cynic, when at last
His life of dry philosophy was past,
Meeting rich Crœsus in the realms below,
Did a benignant smile on him bestow;
And while his threadbare cloak he did unfold
And lay beside the king of Lydian gold:
'My station is the better now,' says he:
'Thou hast lost all *thy* wealth: I've brought all mine with me.'

THE DEAD TO HIS MURDERER.

Ay, hide me as thou wilt, where none can see:
The eye of heaven beholdeth me and thee.

EPITAPH.

My eating it was small in life, my drinking it was small—
My physic, much; death came at last. The foul fiend take ye all!

ANOTHER.

Fortune, and Hope, a long farewell;—I have attained my port;
Now, I have no concern with you: with my survivors sport.

ANOTHER. ON A FRIEND.

This stone, Sabinus, is a token small
Of our great love: and I, whate'er befall,
For thee shalt ever mourn; and thou, I pray,
Wash not in Lethe's stream our vows away.

ON ONE WHO BURIED HIMSELF BEFORE DEATH.

Worn out with age and penury,
Without a friend to give
The pittance whereby misery
Might cheer itself and live,

With trembling limbs beneath this tomb,
Dragging myself, I gained
Fulfilment of one common doom,
Not without toil attained.
In me the law reversed is seen,
Which through the world is spread:
For *dead* and *buried* most have been,
I, *buried*, and then *dead*.

EPITAPH ON AN INFANT.

When I had now but tasted life,
God summoned me away:
Whether in mercy or in wrath,
I have not power to say.

We conclude our extracts with one of the most beautiful of Greek epigrams, also without an owner, but which will be remembered as long as Poetry shall live:

Protè, thou hast not died, but thou art fled
Into some better land of joy and rest;
Thou dwellest in the islands of the blest,
Where flowery plains elysian thou dost tread
In the glad dance; where never tear is shed,
Nor wintry chill doth strike, nor heat infest,
Nor pain disturb the quiet of thy breast,
Nor raging thirst, nor hunger dost thou dread.
The life of men on earth thou enviest not:
Thou art supremely happy, nor hast cause
To blame the pure enjoyment of thy lot;
Whose life its daily sweet contentment draws
From the effulgence, uncreate and clear,
Of Heaven's high firmament that shineth near.

Our meditations on Grecian lore are now ended. No more of that glorious clime, where the spirit of man seems to have drunk the warm rays of the god of gladness, and reflected them forth upon the ages of time; no more of game or contest, where the god-like forms of heroes were displayed to wondering thousands, and the statues arose which have

charmed the world; no more of deep sweet strains, the very soul of Poetry, each word instinct with light of thought, each cadence falling on the delighted ear and stirring inward tears. No more of the lofty bearing of super-human beings grieving their huge griefs, and joying their awful joys; no more of that keen sense of corporeal and mental beauty, so fresh in those old Poets, so unalloyed, so entire. The choral dance is over; the stately epic has ceased its march; the pomp of the tragedy has swept by: the shepherds have ceased their music, and are sleeping on the green bank by the lake: the fragments of the beautiful song which rung joyously over us erewhile, now sound faint and whispery in the distance.

But if aught of divine Poesy have been awakened in the breast of those who knew not these things before; if, as some few echoes of sympathy have told us, there be who love to wander by the old poetic fountains with our guidance, we have our best reward. Let our English hearts be roused—let the great names and high thoughts of other days be 'the spur which the clear spirit doth raise.' There is much yet to be sung—much holy ground of Poesy yet untrodden. Creation, History, the Mind of Man, all have their pleasant places where the Poet may wander in 'thoughts that move harmonious numbers.' If to such pilgrimages we might be accessary, the pleasure which we have experienced in writing will be forgotten, in joy over the fruit of our labours.

THE END.

APPENDIX I.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF GREECE FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS WORK.

ANCIENT Greece was comprised between the 36th and 40th degrees of north latitude, and comprehended rather more than the present kingdom of Greece. Besides that part of it on the European continent, there were various colonies planted in the neighbouring islands and on the opposite coast of Asia Minor, whose territories were reckoned part of Greece.

European Greece consisted of 1. the northern part, comprising the provinces of Thessaly, Epirus, Doris, Phocis, Locris, Acarnania, Ætolia, Bœotia, and Attica; 2. the southern part, divided from the former by a narrow Isthmus, and called the *Peloponnesus*, or 'island of Pelops.' It was divided into six provinces, Achaia, Argolis, Laconia, Messenia, and Elis, round the coast, and Arcadia, central.

THE PRINCIPAL CITIES OF EUROPEAN GREECE WERE,

1. Athens; the capital of the province of Attica, situated on a craggy and poor soil, near the sea, and on these accounts in early times the refuge of those who had been driven from more fertile settlements by neighbours too strong for them. Hence Athens became populous; and in process of time absolute government having been overthrown, its polity became democratical, Solon being the reputed author of their laws, which were from time to time abrogated or altered by the popular assemblies. The rise of the Athenians into power took place immediately after the memorable invasion of Greece by the Persian monarch, Xerxes, and they continued the chief people in Greece for

about eighty years. But it is in arts, not in arms, that we must look for the great superiority of Athens. Here the Grecian drama, tragic and comic, was brought to maturity and beauty; here the various schools of philosophy rose and flourished; here the divine art of Phidias breathed meaning into senseless marble, and Pericles raised on earth a city fit for gods to dwell in. Here Providence gave example of the greatest perfection of the uninspired intellect of man; and God was pleased to shew how far human reason might advance in search of himself. One city, and one only, has a name and a fame more venerable; and its streets were trodden by the Divine Wisdom himself. Of this pre-eminence the Athenians themselves were wonderfully aware. They thought, they spoke, they wrote, for posterity. Their mob-harangues are subtler than our books of philosophy; their wars and policy were viewed as patterns for the world; when they died in glory, they looked for eternal memory in the minds of men, and boasted that the whole earth would be their sepulchre. The splendour of this city waned before the bright rising of the Christian revelation; and those to whom the glories of the unseen world had been made known, might see in its lingering schools and sophists, the remains of its giant intellect. Yet all has not passed away: in its works of fiction and of art, many principles of beauty are latent which we have not yet evolved; and its two great philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, will ever be unequalled, the one in the domain of speculation and fancy, the other in the toil of patient observation and assiduous comparison.

2. Lacedæmon. This city was the capital of the province of Laconia, already named as on the coast of Peloponnesus. It was in every respect the counterpart of Athens. A conquering people, the Spartans, had taken possession of it, and while they themselves were ruled by an oligarchy under the name of regal government, exercised over the subdued people absolute, and in some cases unrelenting, power. The Spartans were of the race of the Dorians, a people governed wherever

they are found among the ancients, by laws peculiar to themselves. The character of these laws was to merge the individual in the state, and to inculcate as the great principle of life, DUTY. In such a system was involved the suppression of the finer feelings—the nursing and bringing to perfection of the most resolute and unflinching courage—the contempt of death—and of life without honour. In such an atmosphere arts could not flourish, but arms were everything. Till the invasion of Greece by Xerxes, Sparta held the supremacy. It was nobly vindicated by the resolute stand which her king, Leonidas, made at Thermopylæ with three hundred Spartans and a few allies against the myriads of the East: but they lost it shortly afterwards by the insolence which their commanders shewed to the allies. From this time the star of Sparta began to sink. For although the issue of the war with Athens was favourable to her, yet it was by intriguing with Persia that she endeavoured to maintain her standing; and while Athens rose in temporary splendour again, Lacedæmon sunk under the power of tyrants, and was speedily blotted out from the nations. A conquering people, unrenewed by intermarriage with the conquered, proud and tyrannical, could not but waste away and finally become extinct.

3. Thebes, the capital of Bœotia, was for a little time elevated to the pre-eminence over Greece, during the life of her great generals, Pelopidas and Epaminondas—but her history is a dark and disgraceful one. When Xerxes invaded Greece the Thebans deserted the common cause and sided with the Persians. Their conduct throughout the following wars was a tissue of treachery and cowardice. This city and the district in which it lay, were proverbial for the stupidity of their inhabitants. Yet was Thebes the birthplace of the poet Pindar. In earlier times, tradition assigns to this city the birth of Hercules.

4. Corinth, the capital of Achaia, situate on the isthmus above mentioned, and from its situation commanding a vast influx of commerce from both seas. In early times it was

called 'the wealthy Corinth;' and in latter times, so dissolute and expensive were its pleasures, that there was an adage,

It is not every one can go to Corinth.

It was not fertile in great men, but had an illustrious colony, Syracuse, from which sprung Theocritus and the pastoral poets; and whose kings were the great patrons of learning and art.

Asiatic Greece was divided into the provinces of Ionia and Æolia, with a small strip called after its mother country in Europe, Doris. Its chief cities were Smyrna, Miletus, and Cnidus. In later times the Greeks spread more widely, and other places sprung up, hardly known in the high and palmy days of Greece.

The islands, which thickly stud the sea between Europe and Asia, were peopled with Grecian colonies, mostly of that race called Æolian. They were with few exceptions, dependencies of Athens. The most illustrious among them are unquestionably,

1. LESBOS, with its chief town Mitylene, the birthplace of Sappho and Alcæus. At one time the people of Mitylene were on the point of being exterminated—having revolted against Athens, and being condemned to death on their re-capture. But a reversion of the decree was with difficulty obtained: a second ship was sent out from Athens with all haste; and just arrived in time—for the decree was being read previously to being put in execution. Arion and Terpander, poets of traditionary fame, were also natives of Lesbos.

2. CHIOS, the reputed birthplace of Homer. In one of the hymns ascribed to that poet, the following beautiful passage occurs:

Farewell, ye Delian nymphs: in future years
Remember me, when some man shall enquire
Of you, and say: Ye nymphs, what man is here
The sweetest songster, and delights ye most?

Then make ye answer all with one accord:
A blind man—and he dwells in Chios' rocky isle.

3. DELOS was a celebrated island as having been the reputed birthplace of Apollo and Diana, the children of Latona. The island was thence held sacred, and was never plundered in war. The Athenians more than once performed a solemn purification of it by command of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi.

THE

MOST CELEBRATED MOUNTAINS OF GREECE WERE,

1. OLYMPUS, the fabled heaven of the Greek deities, in Thessaly.
2. PELION and OSSA, which the giants were fabled to have piled on one another in their wars with the gods, also in Thessaly.
3. PINDUS, on the frontier of Thessaly and Epirus.
4. ŒTA, which reaches the sea at Thermopylæ, where the Spartans opposed Xerxes.
5. PARNASSUS, the fabled seat of the Muses and of Bacchus, in Phocis, overlooking the sacred city and oracle of Delphi.
6. HELICON, also in Phocis, overlooking Ascra, the birthplace of Hesiod.
7. CITHÆRON, on the frontier of Bœotia and Attica.
8. TAYGETUS, in the neighbourhood of Sparta.

THE MOST CELEBRATED RIVERS WERE,

1. The PENEUS, rising in Mount Pindus, and flowing under Mount Ossa through the celebrated valley of Tempe into the Ægean sea.

2. The CEPHISSUS, watering Bœotia and running into the lake Copaïs, in the centre of that province.
3. Another of the same name, which, insignificant in size though celebrated in song, irrigates, together with the Ilissus, the plain of Athens.
4. ALPHEUS, which waters the valley of Elis, where were held the Olympian games.
5. EUROTAS, flowing by Sparta; the bath of the Spartan youths and virgins: and
6. ACHELOUS, rising in part of Mount Pindus, and flowing through Ætolia into the Western or Ionian sea.

The following is a list of the most celebrated poets of Greece, with their birthplaces, dates, and the subjects on which they wrote.

	Born at	Before Christ.	
Homer	Supposed Chios, but certainly in the islands or in Asiatic Greece	abt. 900	Wars of Troy; return of Odysseus; battle of frogs and mice; and hymns.
Hesiod	Ascra in Bœotia	900	Husbandry; the birth of the gods.
Archilochus	Island of Paros	690	Elegies and satires.
Tyrtæus	Athens, but sent to Sparta	680	Warlike elegies.
Alcæus, Sappho	Mitylene in Lesbos	600	Lyrical poems and elegies.
Simonides	Island of Ceos	540	Elegies.
Pindar	Thebes	490	Odes.
Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides	Athens	480 to 440	Tragedies, and tragi-comedies, called satyric dramas.
Aristophanes	Athens	425	Comedies, satirizing public men and measures.
Menander	Athens	320	Comedies, in the general acceptation.
Theocritus, Bion, Moschus	Syracuse	280	Pastoral poetry.

We have subjoined a list of the Grecian deities with their offices, and corresponding Latin names, the latter being more usually known, but the Greek names being used for the most part in the foregoing chapters:

Ouranos Gaia	Cœlum Terra	Heaven and Earth; the most ancient gods, and progenitors of the rest.
Cronos	Saturn	The ruler of the next dynasty of gods, and father of that one which reigns in Grecian mythology.
Zeus	Jupiter	The king of heaven.
Poseidon	Neptune	Brother of Zeus and god of the sea.
Pluto	Pluto	Brother of Zeus and god of the infernal regions.
Apollo also Phœbus	Apollo also Phœbus	God of light. Son of Zeus by Leto or Latona.
Ares	Mars	God of war. Son of Zeus and Hera.
Hera	Juno	Sister and wife to Zeus.
Pallas also Athena	Minerva	Daughter of Zeus only, without a mother Goddess of wisdom and warlike arts.
Aphrodite also Cypris and Cytherea	Venus also Cytherea	Sprung from the sea-foam. Goddess of Love and Beauty.
Heracles	Hercules	Son of Zeus by Alcmena, wife to Amphitryon of Thebes. Not a *god proper*, but a man exalted to a god—but usually ranked with the gods
Artemis	Diana	Apollo's sister. The virgin goddess of hunting.
Demeter	Ceres	Daughter of Saturn and Vesta. Goddess of corn.
Persephone	Proserpina	Daughter of Demeter by Zeus, was carried off by Pluto, and became his queen.

APPENDIX II.

POEMS FROM VARIOUS AUTHORS CONNECTED WITH THE SUBJECTS OF THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS.

ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER.

JOHN KEATS.

"Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen:
Round many western Islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darlin."

ATHENS. FROM PARADISE REGAINED.

JOHN MILTON.

"Look once more, ere we leave this specular mount,
Westward, much nearer by southwest, behold
Where on the Ægean shore a city stands
Built nobly, pure the air, and light the soil,
Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts
And eloquence, native to famous wits

Or hospitable, in her sweet recess,
City or suburban, studious walks and shades;
See there the olive grove of Academe,
Plato's retirement, where the Attic bird
Trills her thick-warbled notes the summer long;
There flowery hill Hymettus with the sound
Of bees' industrious murmur oft invites
To studious musing; there Ilissus rolls
His whisp'ring stream: within the walls then view
The schools of ancient sages: his who bred
Great Alexander to subdue the world,
Lyceum there, and painted Stoa next:
There shalt thou hear and learn the secret power
Of harmony in tones and numbers hit
By voice or hand, and various-measured verse,
Æolian charms and Dorian lyric odes,
And his who gave them breath, but higher sung,
Blind Melesigenes, thence Homer call'd,
Whose poem Phœbus challenged for his own.
Thence what the lofty grave tragedians taught
In Chorus or Iambic, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd
In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate, and chance, and change in human life;
High actions, and high passions best describing:
Thence to the famous orators repair,
Those ancient, whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will that fierce democratie,
Shook th' arsenal, and fulmin'd over Greece,
To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne:
To sage philosophy next lend thine ear,
From Heav'n descended to the low-rooft house
Of Socrates; see there his tenement,
Whom well inspir'd the oracle pronounc'd
Wisest of men; from whose mouth issued forth
Mellifluous streams that water'd all the schools
Of Academics old and new, with those
Surnam'd Peripatetics, and the sect
Epicurean, and the Stoic severe"

THE GRASSHOPPER.

ABRAHAM COWLEY.

"HAPPY insect! what can be
In happiness compar'd to thee?
Fed with nourishment divine,
The dewy morning's gentle wine!
Nature waits upon thee still,
And thy verdant cup does fill;
'Tis fill'd wherever thou dost tread,
Nature's self's thy Ganymede.
Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing,
Happier than the happiest king!
All the fields which thou dost see,
All the plants, belong to thee;
All that summer-hours produce,
Fertile made with early juice;
Man for thee does sow and plow;
Farmer he, and landlord thou!
Thou dost innocently joy,
Nor does thy luxury destroy.
The shepherd gladly heareth thee,
More harmonious than he.
Thee country hinds with gladness hear,
Prophet of the ripened year!
Thee Phœbus loves, and does inspire!
Phœbus is himself thy sire.
To thee of all things upon earth,
Life is no longer than thy mirth.
Happy insect! happy! thou
Dost neither age nor winter know:
But when thou 'st drunk, and danc'd, and sung
Thy fill, the flow'ry leaves among,
(Voluptuous, and wise withal,
(Epicurean animal!)
Sated with thy summer feast,
Thou retir'st to endless rest."

THE SPIRIT OF GREECE.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

"The lively Grecian in a Land of hills,
Rivers, and fertile plains, and sounding shores,
Under a cope of variegated sky,
Could find commodious place for every God,
Promptly received, as prodigally brought,
From the surrounding Countries—at the choice
Of all adventurers. With unrivalled skill,
As nicest observation furnished hints
For studious fancy, did his hand bestow
On fluent Operations a fixed shape:
Metal or Stone, idolatrously served.
And yet—triumphant o'er this pompous show
Of Art, this palpable array of Sense,
On every side encountered; in despite
Of the gross fictions chanted in the streets
By wandering Rhapsodists; and in contempt
Of doubt and bold denial hourly urged
Amid the wrangling Schools—a SPIRIT hung,
Beautiful Region! o'er thy Towns and Farms,
Statues and Temples, and memorial Tombs;
And emanations were perceived; and acts
Of immortality in Nature's course,
Exemplified by mysteries, that were felt
As bonds, on grave Philosopher imposed
And armed Warrior; and in every grove
A gay or pensive tenderness prevailed,
When piety more awful had relaxed.
—'Take, running river, take these Locks of mine'—
Thus would the Votary say—'this severed hair,
'My vow fulfilling, do I here present,
'Thankful for my beloved Child's return.
'Thy banks, Cephissus, he again hath trod,
'Thy murmurs heard: and drunk the crystal lymph
'With which thou dost refresh the thirsty lip,
'And moisten all day long these flowery fields!'
And doubtless, sometimes, when the hair was shed
Upon the flowing stream, a thought arose

Of Life continuous, Being unimpaired;
That hath been, is, and where it was and is
There shall endure,—existence unexposed
To the blind walk of moral accident;
From diminution safe and weakening age;
While Man grows old, and dwindles, and decays;
And countless generations of Mankind
Depart; and leave no vestige where they trod."

HELEN AND IPHIGENIA.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

"At length I saw a lady within call,
Stiller than chiseled marble standing there,
A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.

"Her loveliness with shame and with surprise
Froze my swift speech; she turning on my face
The starlike sorrows of immortal eyes,
Spoke slowly in her place.

"'I had great beauty: ask thou not my name:
No one can be more wise than destiny.
Many drew swords and died. Where'er I came
I brought calamity.'

"'No marvel, sovran lady! in fair field,
Myself for such a face had boldly died,'
I answered free, and turning I appealed
To one that stood beside.

"But she, with sick and scornful looks averse,
To her full height her stately statue draws;
"My youth,' she said, 'was blasted with a curse:
This woman was the cause.

"'I was cut off from hope in that sad place,
Which yet to name my spirit loathes and fears:
My father held his hand upon his face;
I, blinded with my tears,

" 'Still strove to speak—my voice was thick with sighs
As in a dream. Dimly I could descry
The stern blackbearded kings with wolfish eyes,
Waiting to see me die.

" 'The tall masts quivered as they lay afloat,
The temples and the people and the shore:
One drew a sharp knife through my tender throat
Slowly,—and nothing more.'

" Whereto the other with a downward brow:
'I would the white cold heavy-plunging foam,
Whirled by the wind, had rolled me deep below,
Then when I left my home.'"

MODERN GREECE.

LORD BYRON.

" Ah! Greece! they love thee least who owe thee most;
Their birth, their blood, and that sublime record
Of hero sires, who shame thy now degenerate horde!

" When riseth Lacedemon's hardihood,
When Thebes Epaminondas rears again,
When Athen's children are with hearts endued,
When Grecian mothers shall give birth to men,
Then may'st thou be restor'd; but not till then.
A thousand years scarce serve to form a state;
An hour may lay it in the dust: and when
Can man its shatter'd splendour renovate,
Recal its virtues back, and vanquish Time and Fate?

" And yet how lovely in thine age of woe,
Land of lost gods and godlike men! art thou!
Thy vales of evergreen, thy hills of snow,
Proclaim thee Nature's varied favourite now;
Thy fanes, thy temples to thy surface bow,
Commingling slowly with heroic earth,
Broke by the share of every rustic plough:
So perish monuments of mortal birth,
So perish all in turn, save well-recorded Worth;

" Save where some solitary column mourns
Above its prostrate brethren of the cave;

Save where Tritonia's airy shrine adorns
Colonna's cliff, and gleams along the wave;
Save o'er some warrior's half-forgotten grave,
Where the gray stones and unmolested grass
Ages, but not oblivion, feebly brave,
While strangers only not regardless pass,
Lingering like me, perchance, to gaze, and sigh Alas!

"Yet are thy skies as blue, thy crags as wild;
Sweet are thy groves, and verdant are thy fields,
Thine olive ripe as when Minerva smiled,
And still his honied wealth Hymettus yields;
There the blithe bee his fragrant fortress builds,
The freeborn wanderer of thy mountain-air;
Apollo still thy long, long summer gilds,
Still in his beam Mendeli's marbles glare;
Art, Glory, Freedom fail, but Nature still is fair.

"Where'er we tread 'tis haunted, holy ground;
No earth of thine is lost in vulgar mould,
But one vast realm of wonder spreads around,
And all the Muse's tales seem truly told,
Till the sense aches with gazing to behold
The scenes our earliest dreams have dwelt upon:
Each hill and dale, each deepening glen and wold
Defies the power which crush'd thy temples gone:
Age shakes Athena's tower, but spares gray Marathon.

"The sun, the soil, but not the slave, the same;
Unchanged in all except its foreign lord—
Preserves alike its bounds and boundless fame
The Battle-field, where Persia's victim horde
First bow'd beneath the brunt of Hellas' sword,
As on the morn to distant Glory dear,
When Marathon became a magic word;
Which utter'd, to the hearer's eye appear
The camp, the host, the fight, the conqueror's career,

"The flying Mede, his shaftless broken bow;
The fiery Greek, his red pursuing spear;
Mountains above, Earth's, Ocean's plain below;
Death in the front, Destruction in the rear!
Such was the scene—what now remaineth here?
What sacred trophy marks the hallow'd ground,

Recording Freedom's smile and Asia's tear?
The rifled urn, the violated mound,
The dust thy courser's hoof, rude stranger! spurns around.

"Yet to the remnants of thy splendour past
Shall pilgrims, pensive, but unwearied throng;
Long shall the voyager, with th' Ionian blast,
Hail the bright clime of battle and of song;
Long shall thine annals and immortal tongue
Fill with thy fame the youth of many a shore;
Boast of the aged! lesson of the young!
Which sages venerate and bards adore,
As Pallas and the Muse unveil their awful lore.

"The parted bosom clings to wonted home,
If aught that's kindred cheer the welcome hearth;
He that is lonely hither let him roam,
And gaze complacent on congenial earth.
Greece is no lightsome land of social mirth:
But he whom Sadness sootheth may abide,
And scarce regret the region of his birth,
When wandering slow by Delphi's sacred side,
Or gazing o'er the plains where Greek and Persian died.

"Let such approach this consecrated land,
And pass in peace along the magic waste:
But spare its relics—let no busy hand
Deface the scenes, already how defaced!
Not for such purpose were these altars placed:
Revere the remnants nations once revered:
So may our country's name be undisgraced,
So may'st thou prosper where thy youth was rear'd
By every honest joy of love and life endear'd!"

BEAUTY AND WEAKNESS OF THE GRECIAN MIND.

SCHOOL OF THE HEART.

"How beautiful was Greece—how marvellous
In polity, and chastened grace severe—
In nicely-balanced strains, and harmonies
Tuned to the varying passion! flute or lyre
Not unaccompanied by solemn dance
In arms, or movement of well-ordered youths

And maids in Dorian tunic simply clad;—
How rich in song, and artful dialogue,
Long-sighted irony, and half earnest guess
At deeply-pondered truth.
" But spirits pure,
Deep drinking at the fount of natural joy,
Grew sad and hopeless as the foot of Death
Crept onwards; and beyond the deep-blue hills
And plains o'erflowed with light, and woody paths,
No safe abode of everduring joy
Lifted its promise to the sight of Man.

" ' Farewell, farewell for ever—never more
Thy beautiful young form shall pass athwart
Our fond desiring vision;—the great world
Moves on, and human accidents; and Spring
New-clothes the forests, and the warm west wind
Awakes the nightingales;—but thou the while
A handful of dull earth, art not, and we,
Insatiable in woe, weep evermore
Around the marble where thine ashes lie:'
Such sounds by pillared temple, or hill-side
Sweet with wild roses, or by sacred stream
Errant through mossy rocks, saddened the air,
Whether ripe virgin on the bier were borne,
Or youth untimely cropped; or in still night
The moon shone full, and choir of maidens moved
Through glades distinct with shadow, bearing vows
Of choicest flowers and hair,—fearful the while
Of thwarting influence or uncautious word,
Till round the tomb they poured their votive wine
And moved in dance, or chanted liquid hymns
Soothing the rigid silence. ' Fare thee well;
A journey without end, a wakeless sleep,
Or some half-joyful place, where feeble ghosts
Wander in dreamy twilight, holds thee now;
Thy joy is done; and thine espousals kept
Down in the dark house of forgetfulness.' "

FROM THE ŒNONE.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

"THERE is a dale in Ida, lovelier
Than any in old Ionia, beautiful
With emerald slopes of sunny sward, that lean
Above the loud glenriver, which hath worn
A path thro' steepdown granite walls below
Mantled with flowering tendriltwine. In front
The cedarshadowy valleys open wide.
Far-seen, high over all the Godbuilt wall
And many a snowycolumned range divine,
Mounted with awful sculptures—men and Gods,
The work of Gods—bright on the darkblue sky
The windy citadel of Ilion
Shone, like the crown of Troas. Hither came
Mournful Œnonè wandering forlorn
Of Paris, once her playmate. Round her neck,
Her neck all marblewhite and marblecold,
Floated her hair or seemed to float in rest.
She, leaning on a vine-entwined stone,
Sang to the stillness, till the mountain shadow
Sloped downward to her seat from the upper cliff.

"'O mother Ida, manyfountained Ida,
Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
The grasshopper is silent in the grass,
The lizard with his shadow on the stone
Sleeps like a shadow, and the scarletwinged
Cicala in the noonday leapeth not.
Along the water-rounded granite rock
The purple flower droops: the golden bee
Is lilycradled: I alone awake.
My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love,
My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim,
And I am all aweary of my life.

"'O mother Ida, manyfountained Ida,
Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
Hear me O Earth, hear me O Hills, O Caves
That house the cold crowned snake! O mountain brooks,
I am the daughter of a River-God,

Hear me, for I will speak, and build up all
My sorrow with my song, as yonder walls
Rose slowly to a music slowly breathed,
A cloud that gathered shape: for it may be
That, while I speak of it, a little while
My heart may wander from its deeper woe.

"'O mother Ida, manyfountained Ida,
Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
Aloft the mountain lawn was dewydark,
And dewydark aloft the mountain pine;
Beautiful Paris, evilhearted Paris,
Leading a jetblack goat whitehorned, whitehooved,
Came up from reedy Simois all alone.

"'O mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
I sat alone: the goldensandalled morn
Rosehued the scornful hills: I sate alone
With downdropt eyes: whitebreasted like a star
Fronting the dawn he came: a leopard skin
From his white shoulder drooped: his sunny hair
Clustered about his temples like a God's:
And his cheek brightened, as the foambow brightens
When the wind blows the foam; and I called out,
'Welcome Apollo, welcome home Apollo,
Apollo, my Apollo, loved Apollo.'

"Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
He, mildly smiling, in his milkwhite palm
Close-held a golden apple, lightningbright
With changeful flashes, dropt with dew of heaven
Ambrosially smelling. From his lip,
Curved crimson, the fullflowing river of speech
Came down upon my heart.

"'My own Œnone,
Beautifulbrowed Œnone, mine own soul,
Behold this fruit, whose gleaming rind ingrav'n
'For the most fair,' in aftertime may breed
Deep evilwilledness of heaven and sere
Heartburning toward hallowed Ilion;
And all the colour of my afterlife
Will be the shadow of to-day. To-day
Herè and Pallas and the floating grace
Of laughterloving Aphrodite meet

In manyfolded Ida to receive
This meed of beauty, she to whom my hand
Awards the palm. Within the green hillside,
Under yon whispering tuft of oldest pine,
Is an ingoing grotto, strown with spar
And ivymatted at the mouth, wherein
Thou unbeholden may'st behold, unheard
Hear all, and see thy Paris judge of Gods.'

" 'Dear mother Ida, hearken here I die.
It was the deep midnoon: one silvery cloud
Had lost his way between the piney hills.
They came—all three—the Olympian goddesses:
Naked they came to the smoothswarded bower.
Lustrous with lilyflower, violeteyed
Both white and blue, with lotetree-fruit thickset,
Shadowed with singing pine; and all the while,
Above, the overwandering ivy and vine
This way and that in many a wild festoon
Ran riot, garlanding the gnarlèd boughs
With bunch and berry and flower thro' and thro'.
On the treetops a golden glorious cloud
Leaned, slowly dropping down ambrosial dew.
How beautiful they were, too beautiful
To look upon! but Paris was to me
More lovelier than all the world beside.

" 'O mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
First spake the imperial Olympian
With archèd eyebrow smiling sovranly,
Fulleyèd Herè. She to Paris made
Proffer of royal power, ample rule
Unquestioned, overflowing revenue
Wherewith to embellish state, 'from many a vale
And riversundered champaign clothed with corn,
Or upland glebe wealthy in oil and wine—
Honour and homage, tribute, tax and toll,
From many an inland town and haven large,
Mast-thronged below her shadowing citadel
In glassy bays among her tallest towers.'

" 'O mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
Still she spake on and still she spake of power

'Which in all action is the end of all.
Power fitted to the season, measured by
The height of the general feeling, wisdomborn
And throned of wisdom—from all neighbour crowns
Alliance and allegiance evermore.
Such boon from me Heaven's Queen to thee kingborn,
A shepherd all thy life and yet kingborn,
Should come most welcome, seeing men, in this
Only are likest gods, who have attained
Rest in a happy place and quiet seats
Above the thunder, with undying bliss
In knowledge of their own supremacy;
The changeless calm of undisputed right,
The highest height and topmost strength of power.'

"'Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
She ceased, and Paris held the costly fruit
Out at arm's-length, so much the thought of power
Flattered his heart: but Pallas where she stood
Somewhat apart, her clear and barèd limbs
O'erthwarted with the brazenheaded spear
Upon her pearly shoulder leaning cold,
The while, above, her full and earnest eye
Over her snowcold breast and angry cheek
Kept watch, waiting decision, made reply.

"'Selfreverence, selfknowledge, selfcontrol
Are the three hinges of the gates of Life,
That open into power, everyway
Without horizon, bound or shadow or cloud,
Yet not for power (power of herself
Will come uncalled-for) but to live by law
Acting the law we live by without fear,
And, because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom, in the scorn of consequence.
(Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.)
Not as men value gold because it tricks
And blazons outward Life with ornament,
But rather as the miser, for itself.
Good for selfgood doth half destroy selfgood.
The means and end, like two coiled snakes, infect
Each other, bound in one with hateful love.
So both into the fountain and the stream

A drop of poison falls. Come hearken to me,
And look upon me and consider me,
So shalt thou find me fairest, so endurance,
Like to an athlete's arm, shall still become
Sinewed with motion, till thine active will
(As the dark body of the sun robed round
With his own ever-emanating lights)
Be flooded o'er with her own effluences,
And thereby grow to freedom.'

"'Here she ceased,
And Paris pondered. I cried out, 'Oh Paris,
Give it to Pallas!' but he heard me not,
Or hearing would not hear me, woe is me!

"'O mother Ida, manyfountained Ida,
Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
Idalian Aphroditè oceanborn,
Fresh as the foam, newbathed in Paphian wells,
With rosy slender fingers upward drew
From her warm brow and bosom her dark hair
Fragrant and thick, and on her head upbound
In a purple band: below, her lucid neck
Shone ivorylike, and from the ground her foot
Gleamed rosywhite, and o'er her rounded form
Between the shadows of the vinebunches
Floated the glowing sunlights, as she moved.

"'Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
She with a subtle smile in her mild eyes,
The herald of her triumph, drawing nigh
Half whispered in his ear, 'I promise thee
The fairest and most loving wife in Greece.'
I only saw my Paris raise his arm:
I only saw great Herè's angry eyes,
As she withdrew into the golden cloud,
And I was left alone within the bower;
And from that time to this I am alone,
And I shall be alone until I die.'"

DANAE.*

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE DENMAN.

"When the wind, resounding high,
Bluster'd from the northern sky,
When the waves, in stronger tide,
Dash'd against the vessel's side,
Her care-worn cheek with tears bedew'd,
Her sleeping infant Danaë view'd;
And trembling still with new alarms,
Around him cast a mother's arms.
'My child! what woes does Danaë weep!
But thy young limbs are wrapt in sleep,
In that poor nook all sad and dark,
While lightnings play around our bark,
Thy quiet bosom only knows
The heavy sigh of deep repose.

'The howling wind, the raging sea,
No terror can excite in thee;
The angry surges wake no care
That burst above thy long deep hair,
But couldst thou feel what I deplore,
Then would I bid thee sleep the more!
Sleep on, sweet boy: still be the deep!
Oh could I lull my woes to sleep!
Jove, let thy mighty hand o'erthrow
The baffled malice of my foe;
And may this child, in future years,
Avenge his mother's wrongs and tears!'"

FRAGMENT FROM ALCMAN.

THOMAS CAMPBELL.

"The mountain summits sleep: glens, cliffs, and caves,
Are silent—all the black earth's reptile brood—
The bees—the wild beasts of the mountain wood:
In depths beneath the dark red ocean's waves
Its monsters rest, whilst wrapt in bower and spray
Each bird is hush'd that stretch'd its pinions to the day.

* From Simonides. See p. 81.

MARTIAL ELEGY, FROM TYRTÆUS.*

THOMAS CAMPBELL.

How glorious fall the valiant, sword in hand,
In front of battle for their native land!
But oh! what ills await the wretch that yields,
A recreant outcast from his country's fields!
The mother whom he loves shall quit her home,
An aged father at his side shall roam;
His little ones shall weeping with him go,
And a young wife participate his woe;
While scorn'd and scowl'd upon by every face,
They pine for food, and beg from place to place.

Stain of his breed! dishonouring manhood's form,
All ills shall cleave to him:—Affliction's storm
Shall blind him wandering in the vale of years,
Till, lost to all but ignominious fears,
He shall not blush to leave a recreant's name,
And children, like himself, inured to shame.

But we will combat for our fathers' land,
And we will drain the life-blood where we stand
To save our children:—fight ye side by side,
And serried close, ye men of youthful pride,
Disdaining fear, and deeming light the cost
Of life itself in glorious battle lost.

Leave not our sires to stem th' unequal fight,
Whose limbs are nerved no more with buoyant might;
Nor lagging backward, let the younger breast
Permit the man of age (a sight unbless'd)
To welter in the combat's foremost thrust,
His hoary head dishevell'd in the dust,
And venerable bosom bleeding bare.

But youth's fair form, though fallen, is ever fair,
And beautiful in death the boy appears,

* Tyrtæus was an Athenian schoolmaster, afflicted with lameness. The Spartans in their second war with the Messenians were directed by the oracles to apply to Athens for a general. They were contemptuously treated, and Tyrtæus was sent to them. He however succeeded in rousing the Spartan spirit by his martial verses, and victory decided for them.

The hero boy, that dies in blooming years:
In man's regret he lives, and woman's tears,
More sacred than in life, and lovelier far,
For having perish'd in the front of war.

SPECIMEN OF PINDAR.

HENRY ALFORD.

"Joy to the happy souls
Thrice purified on earth,
Thrice springing into birth;
Sing for the happy souls
Whom heavenly-handed Truth hath led,
Unruffled and unsullied,
Thrice springing into birth,
Thrice purified on earth.

For they have walked the road,
The palace-linèd road,
In the narrow distance turreted
With the thousand thousand spires
And the calmly waving fires
Of Hesperian cities bright
Mellowed in their rich sunlight,
By blissful crowds inhabited.
Where the ocean breezes lightly breathing
Round the happy island
Gently ever blow:
Where the golden flowers are warmly blooming
On the thymy highland,
In the mead below,
From the sacred trees forth budding brightly,
Or adown the streams rich glowing,
The streams of the happy island,
Pearly-bedded, mildly-flowing.

By the woods they walk in beauty,
Kissed by ocean breezes lightly breathing;
By the streams they sing in beauty,
Golden flowers in golden garlands ever wreathing.

Sing for the happy souls
Thrice purified on earth,

Thrice springing into birth;
Joy to the happy souls
Whom heavenly-handed Truth hath led,
Unruffled and unsullied,
Thrice springing into birth,
Thrice purified on earth."

THE HOMERIC HEXAMETER DESCRIBED AND EXEMPLIFIED.

SCHILLER.

"SCHWINDELND trägt er dich fort auf rastlos strömenden wogen:
Hinter dir siehst du, du siehst vor dir nur Himmel und meer."

THE SAME IN ENGLISH.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

"STRONGLY it bears us along in swelling and limitless billows,
Nothing before and nothing behind but the sky and the Ocean."

CATULLIAN HENDECASYLLABLES.

COLERIDGE.

"HEAR, my beloved, an old Milesian story!—
High, and embosom'd in congregated laurels,
Glimmer'd a temple upon a breezy headland;
In the dim distance amid the skiey billows
Rose a fair island; the god of flocks had plac'd it.
From the far shores of the bleak resounding island,
Oft by the moonlight a little boat came floating,
Came to the sea-cave beneath the breezy headland,
Where amid myrtles a pathway stole in mazes
Up to the groves of the high embosom'd temple.
There in a thicket of dedicated roses,
Oft did a priestess, as lovely as a vision,
Pouring her soul to the son of Cytherea,
Pray him to hover around the slight canoe-boat,
And with invisible pilotage to guide it
Over the dusk wave, until the mighty sailor
Shivering with ecstasy sank upon her bosom.

THE ISLES OF GREECE.

LORD BYRON.

"'THE isles of Greece, the isles of Greece!
Where burning Sappho lov'd and sung,
Where grew the arts of war and peace,—
Where Delos rose, and Phœbus sprung!
Eternal summer gilds them yet,
But all, except their sun, is set.

"'The Scian and the Teian muse,
The hero's harp, the lover's lute,
Have found the fame your shores refuse;
Their place of birth alone is mute
To sounds which echo further West
Than your sires' Islands of the Blest.

"'Fill high the bowl with Samian wine!
We will not think of themes like these;
It made Anacreon's song divine:
He serv'd—but serv'd Polycrates—
A tyrant—but our masters then
Were still, at least, our countrymen.

"'Fill high the bowl with Samian wine!
Our virgins dance beneath the shade—
I see their glorious black eyes shine;
But, gazing on each glowing maid,
My own the burning tear-drop laves,
To think such breasts must suckle slaves.

"'Place me on Sunium's marbled steep,
Where nothing, save the waves and I,
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
There, swan-like, let me sing and die:
A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine—
—Dash down your cup of Samian wine!'"

FROM A GREEK EPIGRAM.

SAMUEL ROGERS.

"WHILE on the cliff with calm delight she kneels,
And the blue vales a thousand joys recall,
See, to the last, last verge her infant steels!
O fly—ye stir not, speak not, lest it fall.
Far better taught, she lays her bosom bare,
And the fond boy springs back to nestle there."

FROM EURIPIDES.

SAMUEL ROGERS.

"THERE is a streamlet issuing from a rock.
The village-girls, singing wild madrigals,
Dip their white vestments in its waters clear,
And hang them to the sun. There first I saw her.
Her dark and eloquent eyes, mild, full of fire,
'Twas heaven to look upon; and her sweet voice,
As tuneable as harp of many strings,
At once spoke joy and sadness to my soul!"

"DEAR is that valley to the murmuring bees;
And all, who know it, come and come again.
The small birds build there; and, at summer-noon,
Oft have I heard a child, gay among flowers,
As in the shining grass she sate conceal'd,
Sing to herself." * * * * * *

W. DEARDEN, PRINTER, NOTTINGHAM.

ERRATA.

Page 82, line 5, *for* wave, *read* warm.

91, line 16, *for* crowded, *read* crowned.

100, line 4 from bottom, *for* and sapient, *read* and a sapient.

120, title, *for* Orestead, *read* Orestéa.

135, margin, *for* Plays of Sopho-cles: or the tale of Œdipus, *read* Plays of Sophocles on the tale of Œdipus.

140, line 4, *for* advise *read* advice.

149, line 5 from bottom, *for* built, *read* dwelt.

186, line 5 of Sonnet, *after* taint, *dele* full stop.

190, line 10 from bottom, *for* oh! oh! *read* oh ho!

203, line 9 from bottom, *for* a lay, *read* along.

206, line 19, *for* Spencer, *read* Spenser.

217, line 10, *for* when, *read* where.

Ibid. line 35, *for* rise, *read* arise.

220, last line, *for* Œagrius, *read* Œagrus.

221, line 9, *for* Lovers round, *read* Loves around.

230, line 3 from end, *for* accessary, *read* accessory.